


V. L. Mattson



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# LATITUDES



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BY

EDWIN MUIR



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# LATITUDES

## - I

### ROBERT BURNS

"FEW men had so much of the poet about them," said the father of Allan Cunningham, "and few poets so much of the man: the man was probably less pure than he ought to have been, but the poet was pure and bright to the end." It is the only humane judgment passed on Burns by a contemporary: all the others have a touch of cant in them, something morally or socially superior. The most dully respectable circle in literary history sat and watched Burns in his sober hours, driving him regularly to the extreme where good-fellowship was not very strongly flavored with decency. The goodness of his father early drew to the house people with an affectation of deliberate virtue. It attracted the pious Murdoch, the model dominie, who loved to recollect in after years the admonitions he had given to genius. Later Burns, now a young man, was permitted for a time to breathe the musty controversial air

of liberal theology as it was propounded in his county, and he found it so good that he was moved to poetry. This was, however, his only experience of emancipated society. His fame and his journey to Edinburgh again enveloped him in the stupendous Scots respectability of that time; the elegant and priggish minister Blair, the virtuous and respectable Dugald Stewart, "the historian Robertson," sat beside him wondering visibly whether their young genius would become a really respected poet and a prosperous and godly farmer. Their society must occasionally have appeared to him like the reading of an interminable, dull tract. But indeed his educated friends, except for one or two women, had only virtue to recommend them, while his boon companions were equally without sense and sensibility. In spite of a lifelong desire for friends, he found only moralists and tipplers; and although he could move these by the astonishing spectacle of his thoughts and passions, so that when he spoke from his heart they wept, he received nothing back from them to give him happiness, nor, except in states of drunken effusion, any direct human comprehension. As his life grew poorer he turned to these states more and more rather than to the intelligent men of virtue who had less than nothing to give him, and who gave grudgingly.

It was after his visit to Edinburgh that his nature, strongly built and normal, disintegrated. He had hoped, in meeting the first shock of his astonishing triumph in the capital, that an escape was at last possible from the life of hardly maintained poverty which as a boy he had foreseen and feared. He left Edinburgh recognizing that there was no reprieve, that hardship must sit at his elbow to the end of his days. Fame had lifted him up on the point of an immense pinnacle; now the structure had melted away and, astonished, he found himself once more in his native county, an Ayrshire peasant. Some fairy had set him for a little in the centre of a rich and foreign society; then, calmly and finally, she had taken it from under his feet. There is hardly another incident in literary history to parallel this brief rise and setting of social favor, and hardly one showing more the remorselessness of fortune in the world. The shock told deeply on Burns, working more for evil than the taste for dissipation which he was said to have acquired from the Edinburgh aristocracy. His character gradually fell to pieces. The more narrowly decent want constrained him, the more he took to the drink; yet to the last a little good fortune was sufficient to set him back for a time in a self-respecting life. Sometimes the recognition of his degradation aroused in him a violent, almost sui-



cidal remorse. While drinking one afternoon with a friend he was advised a little officiously to be "temperate in all things." At that he started up, drawing his sword, but immediately afterwards threw it away and dashed himself in a fit of shame on the floor. Such an extreme betrayal of himself showed the extent of his pride and the degree in which he had offended it, and in offending it had come to despise himself.

He desired above all things to love and to be loved, yet it is doubtful whether once in his life he had a deep and sincere passion. His imagination demanded something more than the dairymaids and mason's daughters of his parish could give him; but when he dreamed of the Edinburgh women whom he was later to know, his realistic mind quickly cut the reverie short. But it was not only the imperfections of mason's daughters that kept him from loving; there was an obstacle also within himself, a thirst for love which probably no single love affair could have quenched, a too great desire to love which by its vehemence defeated itself. Before long he got into the habit of "battering himself into a warm affection," to use his own words. Yet libertine though he was in fact, he was anything but a libertine in nature. He could imitate the light seducer, but he could not lightly seduce. All his amours for the first and happier part of his life were attempts to

experience, or to delude himself that he experienced, the kind of love for which he sought in vain all his life. In the last years of his life, his amours revenged themselves for their unsuccess, as such things normally do, by becoming mechanical.

He had experienced sufficient hardship, sufficient disappointment and indignity: the astonishing thing was that he remained the sanest of all poets, saner than Shakespeare or than Goethe. He had no Werther, and it was not within his power to feel or to conceive the deep disgust with life which Shakespeare uttered through Macbeth. Often he was dismayed with his own life, and had thoughts of putting an end to it; but something earthy was so strong and unquestioned in him that he was incapable of doubting the value of life itself. His hopelessness was never that of a hopeless man, but of one who, like his fellows, in the midst of discouragement, lives hoping. His sorrows were those of a naturally happy disposition; but they were probably on that account more poignant, for they sprang out with the unpremeditation of agonized surprise. He expressed again and again in his poetry the feeling of eternal separation and of irrevocable fate; but although he threw all his heart into the cry, there was something remaining, something solid and complete which brought him back again to him-

self. He had not that power, or that weakness, which enabled other poets to submerge themselves in an emotion, and become the passion which they felt; he was always in his poetry a man feeling love, grief or anger, and the man came as clearly through the words as the emotion. From this deep-rooted sanity, which was a sort of completeness, he could never be moved. It put a stamp on the smallest of his poems, and is still the thing by which we recognize him. It was what made him include in a love poem, and with perfect propriety, a verse such as this:

I hae been blythe wi' comrades dear;  
I hae been merry drinking;  
I hae been joyfu' gath'rin gear;  
I hae been happy thinking:  
But a' the pleasures e'er I saw,  
Tho' three times doubled fairly,  
That happy night was worth them a'  
Amang the rigs o' barley.

He would bring the whole perspective of life into a verse, and thus give a wider and more human reality to the sentiment of a song than other poets could attain by letting themselves go to the final lengths of passion. His sense of completeness prevented him from writing of love in the void; his lovers were altogether in the world, and their love was, like everything else

in the world, not immune from the reflections of comedy.

His vision of the world was unusually complete. Generally praised as a lyric poet, he was more truly a kind of dramatist. He expressed very seldom in his songs the emotions of Robert Burns, and when he expressed them, he often did it badly. "To Mary in Heaven" and "Man was made to Mourn," poems obviously composed under the stress of deep personal emotion, were among the worst he wrote, and had none of the absolute sureness of dramatic lyrics like "Tam Glen" or "Whistle and I'll come tae ye, my lad." In his songs he put himself in a certain attitude, or rather, a certain number of attitudes, and the voices which spoke through them were those of the entire Scots peasantry of his time. All his songs written for women were especially exquisite; in throwing the emotion of a woman into a song he did not once fail. But even in his songs for men the voice was not often Burns'; it was generally that of the ideal young Scots peasant who is one of his chief creations. He himself became this Scots peasant, generalizing himself in his race and in his class, and changing with the mood into "the rakish rook, Rob Moss-giel," the canny lover stealing away beyond the Lugar to his Nanie, the sober married man who "will take cuckold frae nane," the stiff-necked

democrat pointing to "yon birkie ca'd a lord." So complete, so universal was he here that it may be said of him that he created the modern Scots peasant. He did not make the Scots peasantry any better morally, perhaps, but he gave them something which is more valuable than morality, an æsthetic consciousness of their joys and griefs, their nature and destiny, and left them with some added touch of humanity and of poise.

His songs showed this strong and true dramatic power; but its main achievement was "The Jolly Beggars." In spite of its bestiality (a word, as good as any other, which Arnold was to find for it a hundred years later) that poem was of all his works the most full of "the glory and the joy" which he found as he walked

Behind his plough upon the mountain side.

He filled it with a sense of Bacchanalian ecstasy in which lust became a form of rapture, and every kind of freedom was possible; but all was seen with a sort of divine carelessness, with a charity which had become impartial. He indulged the flesh more riotously in "The Jolly Beggars" than any poet has done since; but also, "penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things," he "unveiled with exquisite



skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling"—one of the functions of poetry, as Wordsworth said. "It is the privilege of poetic genius," he said, writing about "Tam o' Shanter," "to catch, under certain restrictions of which perhaps at the time of its being executed it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found—in the walks of nature, and in the business of men." Burns caught this "spirit of pleasure," and in a poem in which there was not a weak line, not an uncertain intonation, rendered it with a vigor and pliancy which must have astonished himself. He painted corruption in colors so festive and at the same time so objective, that his picture had not only a poetic, but a philosophic value.

In sense of life, in humor, in dramatic force and truth, in organic vigor of style, he was great; but his most divine power was probably that of putting into words more simple and unalterable than any others in Scots or English literature, emotions and thoughts felt by every one. In verses such as


Thou'll break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
That sings beside thy mate;  
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,  
And wistna o' my fate,

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,  
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted,

he found a simplicity more simple than that of Shelley's love lyrics or even than that of Wordsworth's verses on Lucy. Perhaps this simplicity was of a sort which men so cultivated as Shelley and Wordsworth could not have attained. Perhaps only in a great dialect language like the Scots could it have been expressed. It acquired its inevitability by virtue of that propriety of expression which was Burns' most perfect endowment, enabling him to describe what he chose in the best and fewest words; a tinker or a provincial beauty; a scene of devotion or a carousal.

He was much blamed for his faults while he lived, and he has been blamed more since; and the censure which during his life was mischievous, driving him to new excesses, has been since, one suspects, uttered more out of the critics' determination to produce the patents of their respectability than out of any deep detestation of Burns' vices, bad, no doubt, as these were. Coleridge called him "a degraded man of genius"; but it is doubtful whether Burns' vice was as demoralizing as Coleridge's respectability. Throughout the complete tragedy of his

moral downfall, felt poignantly by himself, he maintained his integrity; and although he died at the age of thirty-seven of recurrent excesses and accumulated disappointment, his life was more dignified than Coleridge's: he did not compromise and deceive himself. More than any other poet of the last two centuries he has helped to humanize his own countrymen and the English-speaking peoples generally, and to instill into them not only a more sensitive manner of feeling, but also a more philosophic habit of thought. No one was better fitted than he for the task; no one was farther removed from all perversity of feeling, all singularity of thought. He was a norm of humanity, a model, in everything but his life, for all men. As a consequence there is no writer on whom the blame of succeeding generations lies more lightly; Burns will always be loved, except by a few timid Presbyterians like Stevenson, with a special, warm indulgence. This attitude is one of the lessons which his poems have taught mankind.



## II

### A NOTE ON THE SCOTTISH BALLADS

IT is a thing worth noting that the one or two great poets whom Scotland has produced have been men in the ordinary sense uncultivated. Excepting Scott, those of whom we know anything have sprung from peasant or humble stock; and there was even before Burns, who set a fashion, a tradition of peasant poetry and a belief that an artificer of Scottish song might most congruously be a plowman or a weaver. In poets of this degree, so scarce in English literature, Scottish poetry has almost always been prolific; and against the solitary figure of Blomfield it can set Fergusson, Ramsay, Tannahill, and a host of others, the worst of whom are sentimental and the best, if minor poets, most authentically poets. Outside these, among her imaginative prose writers, Scotland has shown a disposition for common and even mean conditions. Carlyle was the son of a mason, and George Douglas, the young student of Glasgow University who wrote one novel

of passionate genius, "The House with the Green Shutters," and then died, was the illegitimate offspring of a servant girl. Since English became the literary language of Scotland there has been no Scots imaginative writer who has attained greatness in the first or even the second rank through the medium of English. Scott achieved classical prose, prose with the classical qualities of solidity, force and measure, only when he wrote in the Scottish dialect; his Scottish dialogue is great prose, and his one essay in Scottish imaginative literature, "Wandering Willie's Tale," is a masterpiece of prose, of prose which one must go back to the seventeenth century to parallel. The style of Carlyle, on the other hand, was taken bodily from the Scots pulpit; he was a parish minister of genius, and his English was not great English, but great Scots English; the most hybrid of all styles, with some of the virtues of the English Bible and many of the vices of the Scottish version of the Psalms of David; a style whose real model may be seen in Scott's anticipatory parody of it in "Old Mortality." He took the most difficult qualities of the English language and the worst of the Scots and through them attained a sort of absurd, patchwork greatness. But—this can be said for him—his style expressed, in spite of its overstrain, and even through it, something real, the struggle of a Scots

peasant, born to other habits of speech and of thought, with the English language. Stevenson—and it was the sign of his inferiority, his lack of fundamental merit—never had this struggle, nor realized that it was necessary that he should have it. He was from the first a mere literary man, a man to whom language was a literary medium and nothing more, and with no realization of the unconditional mystery and strength of utterance. He sweated over words, but the more laboriously he studied them the more superficial he became, and to the end his conception of an English style remained that of a graceful and colored surface for his thoughts and sensations. Below this were concealed, as pieces of unresolved matter, almost an irrelevancy, the plots of his novels, his knobbly or too smooth characters, and his thoughts which he had never the courage to face. What he achieved was more akin than anything else to what another foreigner, Mr. Joseph Conrad, has since achieved: a picturesque display of words, with something unspanned between the sense and the appearance. The other two Scots-English writers of the last half-century, John Davidson and James Thomson, the author of "The City of Dreadful Night," were greater men than Stevenson, less affected and more fundamental: but fundamental as they were, they lacked something which in English poetry is fundamen-

tal, and the oblivion into which they are fallen, undeserved as it seems when we consider their great talents, is yet, on some ground not easy to state, just. The thing I am examining here, superficial in appearance, goes deep. No writer can write great English who is not born an English writer and in England; and born moreover in some class in which the tradition of English is pure, and it seems to me, therefore, in some other age than this. English as it was written by Bunyan or by Fielding can not be written now except by some one who like them has passed his days in a tradition of living English speech. A whole life went into that prose; and all that Stevenson could give to his was a few decades of application. And because the current of English is even at this day so much younger, poorer and more artificial in Scotland than it is in England, it is improbable that Scotland will produce any writer of English of the first rank, or at least that she will do so until her tradition of English is as common, as unforced and unschooled as if it were her native tongue.

Nor does this exhaust the possibilities, or impossibilities, of the Scottish manipulation of English. The superficially significant thing about Scottish writers is that they generally come from some humble rank of life; the superficially significant thing about English writers is that they



come, as a rule, from some class cultivated, or with a tradition of culture. This difference is, taking a purely literary view, a matter of speech, but it is not entirely nor indeed chiefly so. What distinguishes the Scottish peasantry is not only its cradling in the dialect, but a whole view of life, a view of life intensely simple on certain great, human things, but naturalistic, perhaps in a certain sense materialistic. This simple vision of life, of life as a thing of sin and pleasure, passing, but passing with an intense vividness as of a flame, before something eternal, is the greatest thing which Scotland has given to the literature of the world. Everything which obscures the clearness of this vision, making it less simple than itself when it is most simple, is antagonistic to the Scottish genius; and here, and here only, in defense of their naturalism, of this terrific, sad and simple vision of life, the Scots are iconoclasts, and contemptuous of the thing called culture or humanism which in other lands has had such glorious fruits. Knox expressed the national temper when, disdainfully asserting that the image of the Madonna was only "a bit painted wuid," he threw it into the sea; and Carlyle repeated it on a grand scale in his Dumfriesshire judgments on all the figures which the culture of the West gave into his hands. Carlyle, in genius one of the greatest of all the writers born in Scotland, was



in attainment one of the most patchy and immature, simply because he constantly passed judgments on men and cultures foreign to him; judgments which of Scotsmen and Scots culture would have been true, but which of them were valid perhaps only on some intensely human plane, and on every other absurd.

This sense of life and death, of pleasure and sin, of joy and loss, not thrown out lavishly into all the manifestations of life as Shakespeare threw them out, but intensified to one point, to the breaking point where a flame springs forth: that is the sense which has inspired the greatest Scottish poetry: the poetry of Burns, the poetry of the ballads. Burns, it is true, was more nearly than any other Scottish poet a humanist, and had more than any other a delight in the variety of life; but when he was greatest he came to simplicity, that simplicity of stark, fundamental human things which the ballads more perfectly than any other poetry express. He is not greatest in lines, magical as they are, such as

Yestreen when to the trembling string  
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',

but in

And sae I sat, and sae I sang,  
And wistna o' my fate,

or in

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn  
Frae morning sun to dine,  
But seas between us braid hae roared  
Sin' auld lang syne,

or in

And I will luvè thee still, my dear,  
Though a' the seas gang dry.

The unquenchability of desire, the inexorability of separation, the lapse of time, and all these seen against something eternal and as if, expressed in a few lines, they were what human beings have felt from the beginning of time and must feel until time ends: these things, uttered with entire simplicity, are what at its best Scottish poetry can give us, and it can give them with the intensity and the inevitability of the greatest poetry. The ballads go immediately to that point beyond which it is impossible to go, and touch the very bounds of passion and of life; and they achieve great poetry by an unconditionality which rejects, where other literatures use, the image. In no poetry, probably, in the world is there less imagery than in the ballads. But this, once more, is not the sign of poetic debility, but of a terrific simplicity and intensity, an intensity which never loosens into reflection; and reflection is one of the moods in which images are given to the mind. There is noth-

ing in the ballads but passion, terror, instinct, action: the states in which soul and body alike live most intensely; and this accounts for the impression of full and moving life which, stark and bare as they are, they leave with us. It is this utter absence of reflection which distinguishes them also from the English ballads, not only from those surrounding the name of Robin Hood, which are nothing but simple folk-art, but from really beautiful English ballads such as "The Unquiet Grave." There are several Scottish ballads containing, like it, a dialogue between two lovers, the one living and the other dead; but there is none which treats the subject in this way:

The wind doth blow to-day, my love,  
And a few small drops of rain;  
I never had but one true love;  
In cold grave she is lain. . . .

'Tis down in yonder garden green,  
Love, where we used to walk,  
The finest flower that ere was seen  
Is withered to a stalk.

The stalk is withered dry, my love,  
So will our hearts decay;  
So make yourself content, my love,  
Till God calls you away.

That is beautiful, and as poetry as perfect in its way as anything in the Scottish ballads; but what a difference there is in spirit and in atmosphere. Here there is retrospection and resignation; but there only the present, the eternal present, and the immediate acceptance of it, exist, and we never escape from the unmixed joy, the absolute pain. There is philosophy in "The Unquiet Grave," the quality of a great reflective poetry; there is morality in it, the inescapable ethical sense of the English, and that feeling of ultimate surrender which goes always with a genuine morality. But see with what a total lack of moral compensation, or of moral blunting, or of resignation, or of alleviation—with what a lyrical and unconditional passion the same theme is treated in a great Scottish ballad, in "Clerk Saunders":

"Is there ony room at your head, Saunders?  
Is there ony room at your feet?  
Or ony room at your side, Saunders,  
Where fain, fain wad I sleep?"

"There's nae room at my head, Marg'ret,  
There's nae room at my feet;  
My bed it is fu' lowly now,  
Amang the hungry worms I sleep."

Or, almost as simple and great:

"O cocks are crowing on merry middle earth,  
I wot the wild fowls are boding day;  
Give me my faith and troth again,  
And let me fare me on my way."

"Thy faith and troth thou sallna get,  
And our true love sall never twin,  
Until ye tell what comes o' women,  
I wot, who die in strong traivelling?"

I do not wish to make any comparison between these two poems, both great in their kind, or to praise one at the expense of the other. I wish merely, what is infinitely more important, to make clear what are the peculiar attributes of the Scottish ballads, and what it is that they have given to the poetry of the world. And it is pre-eminently this sense of immediate love, terror, drama; this ecstatic living in passion at the moment of its expression and not on reflection, and the experiencing of it therefore purely, as unmixed joy, as complete terror, in a concentration on the apex of the moment, in a shuddering realization of the moment, whatever it may be, whether it is

I wish that horn were in my kist,  
Yea, and the knight in my arms neist.

or

And I am weary o' the skies  
For my love that died for me.

or

Yestreen I made my bed fu' braid,  
The night I'll make it narrow.

or

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
Everie nighte and alle,  
Fire and sleete and candle lighte,  
And Christe receive thy saule.

This world in which there is no reflection, no regard for the utility of action, nothing but pure passion seen through pure vision, is, if anything is, the world of art. To raise immediate passion to poetry in this way, without the alleviation of reflection, without the necromancy of memory, requires a vision of unconditional clearness, like that of a child; and it may be said of the Scottish ballad-writers that they attained poetry by pure, unalleviated insight, by unquestioning artistic heroism; and this quality it is that, in the last analysis, makes the very greatest poetry great, that makes "Lear" great, and "Antony and Cleopatra." In Shakespeare and in Dante it is united with other qualities through which its utterance becomes infinitely various and rich: in the greatest of the Scottish ballads there is this quality, and this alone. This, and not the occasional

strangeness of their subject matter, is what gives them their magic, a magic of ultimate simplicity, of supernatural simplicity, as in

O they rade on, and farther on,  
And they waded rivers abune the knee,  
And they saw neither sun nor moon  
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

from "Thomas the Rhymer." Or, from "Tam Lin":

About the dead hour o' the night  
She heard the bridles ring.

There is here nothing but a final clearness of vision which finds of itself, as by some natural, or rather, supernatural, process, an absolute reality of utterance which does not need the image. The thing is given in the ballads and not a simile either illuminating or cloaking it; and this absence of the image has in itself an artistic value, and produces an effect which can not be produced in any other way: it makes the real form and color of things stand out with a distinctness which is that, not of things seen by daylight, but of those, more absolute, more incapable of being questioned, which we see in dreams. When a color is set before us in the ballads it has a reality which color has not in poetry where imagery

is used; it has not merely a poetic value, it has the ultimate value of pure color. This is the reason why the ballad of "Jamie Douglas" gives us an impression of richness as of some intricate tapestry, though the means are as simple as

When we cam' in by Glasgow toun  
We were a comely sicht to see;  
My Love was clad in the black velvét,  
And I mysel' in cramasie,

or

I had lock'd my heart in a case o' gowd  
And pinn'd it wi' a siller pin.

There the qualities of the velvet, the crimson, the gold and silver are seen as they are only seen in childhood, for the first time, and with something solid in the vision of them; something which we have perhaps for ever lost, and which the painters of our day, with their preoccupation with volume, are trying to rediscover; but which was given to the ballad-writers by the sheer unconditionality of their vision, and by that something materialistic in the imagination of the Scots which is one of their greatest qualities.

The art of these ballads may appear to us untutored, rough, falling occasionally into absurdities, and, regarding such things as diction and rhyme, showing a contempt for the perfection



towards which all art necessarily strives. But the more we study them the more astonished we must become at their perfection on another side: that completeness of organic form which makes each an economically articulated thing. There is, it is true, a sort of logic of ballad-writing, a technique of repetition, of question and answer, not difficult to handle and handled in some of the ballads far too freely; but in the greatest, in "Clerk Saunders," "May Colvin," "The Lass of Lochroyan," and "Sir Patrick Spens," the technique is fused in the inevitability of the movement from beginning to end, so that one can see them in one glance as one sees a short lyric. The sensation which these give us is the sensation which can only be given by great conscious art. It is not a matter of the compulsory unity which folk-ballads, sung before a company, must have: for that one need only go to the English ballads about Robin Hood, ballads definitely beneath the level of poetry, which can run on in the style of

The King cast off his coat then,  
A green garment he did on,  
And every knight had so, i-wis,  
They clothéd them full soon,

for as long as one likes. The difference between that and

The King sits in Dunfermline toun  
Drinking the blude-red wine

is the difference between a thing seen and shaped by a company of common men in a jovial mood, and a thing seen and shaped by a great spirit, lifted up on the wings of imagination. All these English ballads are timid, ordinary, and have the mediocre happy ending which crowds love. For example, three of Robin Hood's followers, we are told, go down to London, cast themselves on the King's mercy and nevertheless are condemned to death: they are reprieved at the last moment by the Queen. This would not happen in a great Scottish ballad. Johnnie Armstrong, in the ballad of that name, puts himself in the power of the Scots King, and he, too, is condemned to die, but there is no reprieve. The difference in treatment between the two episodes is the difference once more between great poetry, imagined by a heroic and sincere spirit, and second-rate folk-poetry, recounted by good-natured and insincere men. In the ballads of Robin Hood we are not told, as we are in the Scottish, what must happen, the circumstances being such and such; we are told what the ballad-makers wish to happen. The vulgarity of the happy ending, which has disfigured so much of the greatest English imaginative literature since, making it less great than

it should have been, is already full-fledged here. I say vulgarity, for the fault of the happy ending is that it is vulgar; it is a descent from the level of æsthetic vision where tragedy is bearable to that of our ordinary wishes, where it is not; a complete betrayal of truth and beauty at the bidding of an impulse perfectly natural and perfectly common. This surrender negates form by its own spirit, just as the unflinching grasp of æsthetic vision holds and fulfills form. The dependence of style upon this thing is in poetry absolute; and it is by virtue of their spirit, and because they are conceived and executed entirely on the level of æsthetic vision, that the Scottish ballads are opulent in examples of great form and great style, as, to quote an example of both:

Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,  
Edward, Edward?

Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,  
And why sae sad gang ye, O?

O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,  
Mither, mither;

O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,  
And I hae nae mair but he, O.

To write poetry such as that, not only an exquisite sense of form was needed, but a great and sincere spirit, an elevated and intrepid mind.

Looking back on that tremendous world mirrored in the Scottish ballads, one is tempted to exclaim, What a culture there must have been once in that narrow tract of land between Edinburgh and the Border, and what a tragedy it was that its grand conception of life as a thing of sin and enjoyment, of life and death, of time and eternity, realized in pure imagination, was turned by Knox and the Reformation into a theology and a set of intellectual principles! But Knox's work has been done; it has not been undone; and time alone will show whether it ever will be. Certainly only a people who saw life so intensely as a matter of sin and pleasure, of sin in pleasure and pleasure in sin, could have accepted with such passion a theology which saw life as a thing of transgression and damnation. There is something unswerving and, however we may dislike and deplore it, heroic, in the theology as well as the poetry of Scotland. A burning contemplation of things which take men beyond time made her equally the destined victim of Calvinism and the chosen land of the ballads. But of that national tragedy it is idle now to speak. To those, however, who deny that a poetry so immediate as that of Scotland, so entirely without reflection, can be great human poetry and of value in a world in which so much of the dignity of the life of men is involved in the fact that they are capa-

ble of reflection, one can only say that a mighty reflection, or rather something more than a reflection, is implied in the very spirit of the ballads, a reflection on supreme issues which is unerring and absolute and has come to an end; a reflection not tentative, not concerned with this or that episode in a poem, with this or that quality, moral or immoral, or with the practicality or impracticality of life but of life itself, finally and greatly; a reflection which is a living vision of life seen against eternity: the final reflection beyond which it is impossible for the human spirit to go. In the Scottish ballads life is not seen, as it is seen so often in English imaginative literature, as good and bad, moral or immoral, but on a greater and more intense level, as a vision of sin, tremendous, fleeting, always the same and always to be the same, set against some unchangeable thing. In this world, so clear is the full vision that pity is not a moral quality, but simply pity; passion not egoistic, but simply passion; and life and death have the greatness and simplicity of things comprehended in a tremendously spacious horizon. It is idle to attribute this simplicity, which is a capacity for seeing things as they are eternally, to the primitiveness of the existence which the ballads mirror. Life was at that time, as it has been always, complex, a mystery not easily to be pierced. If one wishes to see what mere simplic-

ity without an over-powering vision of life seen *sub specie æternitatis* can do, one can go in any case to the folk-ballads surrounding Robin Hood. But the Scottish ballads have something which ordinary folk-poetry has not, that great quality, that magnanimity about life, inadequately called philosophic, which Arnold found in Homer.

Whether the Scottish genius will ever return to some modified form of the ballad as its preordained medium it is useless to consider to-day. Probably Scottish writers are fated hereafter to use English, and to use it, taking all things into account, not with supreme excellence. But it is difficult to avoid two conclusions: that the ballads enshrine the very essence of the Scottish spirit, and that they could have been written only in the Scottish tongue.

### III

## GEORGE DOUGLAS

A LITTLE over two decades ago, "The House with the Green Shutters," a novel by a young Scots writer, George Douglas, attracted the attention of the critics. It was in reality one of the great novels in the English language. While the sensation caused by his book had not yet subsided, an announcement appeared in the journals that the author, still not much over twenty, had died in tragic circumstances. Hardly anything was said at that time about his brief life, and very little has been said to this day, out of a regard for his misfortunes which, mistaken or not, one must respect. We know now that he was the illegitimate son of a Scots farm servant girl; that he was educated at his village school and, on account of his precocity of talent, sent later to Glasgow University; and that he died after having written his first novel. That work, full of genius and style, is still read and remembered by people who appreciate imaginative literature; but for a decade now I have not seen it mentioned



in any review. Yet in solidity, in form, above all in imaginative power, it is easily greater than anything that has been achieved since, either by the reputations (a little aging) of Mr. Conrad and Mr. Galsworthy, or by later writers such as Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Joyce whom no one can avoid the obsession of taking too seriously. Of Douglas it may be said that the only gift he lacked in comparison with his contemporaries was that of becoming the rage; his other talents were of the kind which are given only to great writers. The novel which "The House with the Green Shutters" resembles most is "Wuthering Heights," and if Douglas was inferior to Emily Brontë in pure imagination, in the capacity to create a world of art which is real and yet is not the world of reality as we see it, he was her superior in many ways: in a power of visualization not like hers, wild and romantic, but exact and solid; in a ripe knowledge, marvelous for his years, of the motives which determine human conduct; in a sense of life which might without exaggeration be compared with that of Scott; and in an architectural completeness which in achieving harmony does not become artificial. Every quality in his novel was genuine and was great, and such as one might have predicted to weather all the accidents of time. Yet, after twenty years, the book has all the appearance of having come to



grief. The chance which robbed Douglas of life after he had written his first book, also robbed that work for the ensuing decade of the notice which was its due. Had the author lived to write a few successors to this novel, these, even had they been mediocre, would have assured it of fame by keeping the author in the central regard of the public.

"The House with the Green Shutters" is, like most first novels in our own time, an autobiographical novel. It is partly the record of the unalleviated life of young John Gourlay (an imaginative portrait of the author), and partly the story of the downfall of the Gourlay family and of the symbol of its pride, the house with the green shutters. These two themes are woven into one, giving the book a unity and an accumulating movement towards disaster. The elder John Gourlay, the chief figure in the book, is one of those Scotsmen of little intellect, brutal will and contemptuous absence of pity who can be found in positions from the highest to the lowest, in Scotland and all over the world. He is stupid, slow of speech, relentless towards his inferiors, without fear of his superiors, giving and taking no quarter; and he is the richest man in the little town of Barbie, where all the small people hate him on account of his wealth, his insolence and his stupidity. Denied by the

dullness of his parts, and perhaps by his honesty, the posts of honor which his social position should have gained him (he could not even hope to become Chairman of the Gasworks!), he builds the house with the green shutters, the most prominent house in Barbie, "cockit up there on the brae," as a symbol of his power and superiority. "Every time he looked at the place he had a sense of triumph over what he knew in his bones to be an adverse public opinion. There was anger in his pleasure, and the pleasure that is mixed with anger often gives the keenest thrill. It is the delight of triumph in spite of opposition. Gourlay's house was a material expression of that delight, stood for it in stone and line." He was always embellishing it, always adding to it, and every improvement "had for its secret motive a more or less vague desire to score off his rivals. '*That'll* be a slap in the face to the Provost!' he smiled, when he planted his great mound of shrubs. 'There's noathing like *that* about the Provost's!'" The Provost, the Deacon, and all the other great little men who suffer under Gourlay's power and indifference, are in time corrupted by their hatred towards him and their inability to give it effect. "But, oh no, not he; he was the big man; he never gave a body a chance! Or if you 'did venture a bit jibe when you met him, he glowered you off the

face of the earth with thae black een of his. Oh, how they longed to get at him! It was not the least of the evils caused by Gourlay's black pride that it perverted a dozen characters. The 'bodies' of Barbie may have been decent enough men in their own way, but against him their malevolence was monstrous." These "bodies" act throughout the book as a malignant chorus to Gourlay's drama, acrid and unavailing at the beginning, when he is at the height of his power, but rising in sordid triumph as he sinks beneath the blows of a new competitor in the town, a man more clever but more ignoble, on the whole, than himself. Gourlay falls in the end through an inability to adapt himself to the changes which come with the arrival of the railway at Barbie; through the fecklessness of his wife, "a long, thin, trollop of a woman, with a long, thin, scraggy neck, seated by the slatternly table, and busy with a frowsy, paper-covered novel"; and the failure of his son, a suffering creature, insolent in prosperity and abject in adversity. These causes ultimately bring about the downfall of the house of the green shutters and the death of all the Gourlays by violent means.

A fatality lies on young Gourlay from his birth; the shapes and colors of things are so intensely apprehended by him that they bring him a personal terror before nature and life.

"With intellect little or none," the author says briefly, "he had a vast, sensational experience"; and that is the cause of his apparent cowardice, his incapacity to face the world. He was born in circumstances of unusual terror. I quote the passage, both as indicating the artistic *motif* for young Gourlay's life, and as an example of Douglas's exact and vivid powers of description.

Ye mind what an awful day it was [he makes one of the characters say], the thunder roared as if the heavens were tumbling on the world, and the lichtnin' sent the trees daudin' on the roads, and folk hid below their beds and prayed—they thocht it was the Judgment! But Gourlay rammed his black stepper in the shafts, and drave like the devil o' hell to Skeighan Drone, where there was a young doctor. The lad was feared to come, but Gourlay swore by God that he should, and he garred him. In a' the country-side driving like his that day was never kenned or heard tell o': they were back within the hour! I saw them gallop up the Main Street; lichtnin' struck the ground before them; the young doctor covered his face wi' his hands, and the horse nickered wi' fear and tried to wheel, but Gourlay stoop up in the gig and lashed him on through the fire.

The mother was never herself again; the boy was born weakly and fretful, and so afraid of the anger of nature that even when he was grown up a thunderstorm sent him hysterical with terror.

A storm broke one summer afternoon when he was in a little wayside station.

A blue-black moistness lay heavy on the cowering earth. The rain came—a few drops at first, sullen, as if loath to come, that splashed on the pavement wide as a crown piece; then a white rush of slanting spears. A great blob shot in through the window, open at the top, and spat wide on Gourlay's cheek. It was lukewarm. He started violently—that warmth on his cheek brought the terror so near. . . . "The heavens are opening and shutting like a man's eye [he cried as the lightning came and went], Oh, it's a terrible thing the world!"

An absolute clearness of vision into the forms of nature, with a total inability to do anything with it: that is the tragedy of young Gourlay.

If this portrait is autobiographical, as it is almost certainly, it is surely one of the strangest pieces of self-revelation ever written. Such self-loathing combined with such clearness of knowledge and delineation, such a masterly holding of oneself up to contempt, a contempt felt first and led by oneself, have an unusualness that approaches unnaturalness. One can not look upon the portrait with pity, for the mood of the author kills a sentiment which to him, one feels, would have appeared facile. Young Gourlay suffers from beginning to end, yet his sufferings do not awaken compassion in the author, but a

mood which one can only call disgust. The human race was disgusting to Douglas as it was to Swift, and its sufferings had generally something ridiculous or mean in them which made them only another circumstance of disgust added to the sum. It was to Douglas, one feels, a metaphysical indignity that the people whom he delineated in "The House with the Green Shutters" should exist; and his novel came clean out of a burning negation of life as he knew it, and with most intensity, therefore, out of a negation of his own being. In this negation there was nothing consoling, no ease from the fact that one had existed, and that in existing one had been vain, vulgar and unreal, as the majority of the human race are. The thing, accordingly, which obsessed him most strongly was not vice or suffering, but the disfiguring touch of vulgarity which he always found upon them. In his portrait of young Gourlay, he revealed this ineluctable vulgarity of existence relentlessly; but inwardly he was appalled by it. This much is sure: only a spirit of the most fine fastidiousness could have apprehended vulgarity so vividly and have hated it so extravagantly. The cowardice of the world, the good sense of the average sensual man, may easily see in such an excess of sensitiveness something pathological; but any one who detaches himself from the conspiracy of mankind



will scarcely deny that Douglas spoke the truth. And truths such as his are not profitless; they are, on the contrary, in the highest degree salutary for us, who usually have no very strong sense of the unsatisfactoriness of our existence as we live it. Douglas saw, it is true, the ignobility of life too constantly, too exclusively. Not one or two, but all of his characters are betrayed into some meanness which we feel is ridiculous, into some movement of the body or of the mind which recalls faintly the gestures of the lower animals. But these perceptions gave Douglas no satisfaction; they were, on the contrary, the obsession and the torment of a disappointed spirit to whom human life and the existence of this world were not enough.

There is a kind of imagination which manifests itself in the vivid realization of great scenes; and there is another kind, higher, indeed the highest, which is shown in the unremitting grasp of the passions and conflicts of the characters in a work, from the beginning to the end. Douglas possessed the latter in a high degree; but he possessed the former in a degree greater than any one else since Emily Brontë. There are places in "The House with the Green Shutters" where the conflict between the two wills is held for twenty pages with that intensity of imagination and greatness of truth, which,

though common in great literature, always astonish us. The last scene between Gourlay and his son, which ends, because there is no other issue for it, with the murder of the father, is too long to quote. It is one of the greatest scenes in literature. In the realization of the immediacy of the enmity between father and son there is nothing to set beside it; and in this direction tragedy could go no farther. I must content myself with transcribing one or two passages less great than this, among the many in the book. After the murder, young Gourlay is pursued by the hallucination that his father's eyes are following him. He soaks his mind in drink and locks himself up in the stable.

An hour later he woke from a terrible dream, flinging his arms up to ward off a face that had been pressing on his own. Were the eyes that had burnt his brain still glaring above him? He looked about him in drunken wonder. From a sky-window a shaft of golden light came slanting into the loose-box, living with yellow motes in the dimness. The world seemed dead; he was alone in the silent building, and from without there was no sound. Then a panic terror flashed in his mind that those eyes had actually been here—and were here with him still—where he was locked up with them alone. He strained his eyeballs in a horrified stare at vacancy. Then he shut them in terror, for why should he look? If he looked the eyes might burn on him out of nothing-



ness. The innocent air had become his enemy—pregnant with unseen terrors to glare at him. To breathe it stifled him; each draught of it was full of menace. With a shrill cry he dashed at the door, and felt in the clutch of his ghastly enemy when he failed to open it at once, breaking his nails on the baffling lock. He mowed and chattered and stamped, and tore at the lock, frustrate in fear. At last he was free! He broke into the kitchen, where his mother sat weeping. She raised her eyes to see a disheveled thing, with bits of straw scattered on his clothes and hair.

"Mother!" he screamed, "mother!" and stopped suddenly, his starting eyes seeming to follow something in the room.

"What are ye glowering at, John?" she wailed.

"Thae damned een," he said slowly, "they're burning my soul! Look, look!" he cried, clutching her thin wrist, "see there, there—coming round by the dresser! A-ah!" he screamed, in hoarse execration, "Would ye, then?" and he hurled a great jug from the table at the pursuing unseen.

The jug struck the yellow face of the clock and the glass jangled to the floor.

Mrs. Gourlay raised her arms, like a gaunt sibyl, and spoke to her Maker quietly, as if he were a man before her in the room. "Ruin and murder," she said slowly, "and madness; and death at my nipple like a child! When will Ye be satisfied?"

This passage, beginning in realistic analysis, rises gradually until it attains in the end a kind of

poetry which is at the same time a simple statement of the literal truth; "death at the nipple like a child" being a cancer contracted long before from a blow given by the husband. This one stroke of intense imagination, in which the mother, after having suffered blindly for so long, realizes in a moment, and in simple, universal terms, all that has befallen her; and emerges, not on the plane of ordinary living but on that of æsthetic contemplation, where her sorrows seem to be impersonal, belonging to her and yet not belonging to her, is one of those signs by which one can tell a writer of great endowment from one of secondary power. Only genius could have realized that situation; and Coleridge in his analysis of imagination would have admitted it as a legitimate example. In his evocation of states such as this, which go to the very limits of human endurance, Douglas is wonderfully sure; and his scenes are full of mastery and vigor as well as of horror. He had the capacity to let himself go, and to let the passions of his characters stand naked before us on the page, as if they had no control over themselves and no choice but to do so.

But his genius was not always on the stretch; his gifts were too solid to manifest themselves in one direction only. He had a capacity not unlike Carlyle's for the vivid phrase. One of his

Scotsmen coming back from Paris describes the incense in Notre Dame as "burning stink." Old Gourlay "had a chest like the heave of a hill." After Templandmuir had insulted him and walked away in the darkness, "his blood rocked him where he stood." Logan, the middle-aged tippler who loved the society of youths, "the slow, sly, cosy man, with a sideward laugh in his eye, a humid gleam" was attracted to young Gourlay on their first meeting in Edinburgh. "He sat smiling in creeshy benevolence, beaming on Gourlay, but saying nothing." It is possible that only a Scotsman, who knows the nuances of the adjective, can grasp all the virtues of that inimitable and ignoble picture. Such minor triumphs as these illustrate perhaps better than his great scenes the most remarkable of young Douglas's qualities; his ability to render confidently and unerringly, with hardly one uncertain touch, whatever his imagination attempted; and his imagination rose to the highest themes.

"The House with the Green Shutters" is an autobiographical novel, but it is autobiographical as "Roderick Random" and "David Copperfield" are autobiographical; that is, with a true detachment, a true measure, and an immense realization not only of the chief figure, but of the life which surrounded him, giving to the portrayal that universality and justice which we de-

mand from art. It is not, like the best example in the other genre, Mr. Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (a work accomplished and sometimes, indeed, beautiful), a full-length picture of the writer himself seen from within, and of the world only through a sort of secondary vision, as it was observed or felt by the hero; but a vision of life with all the figures in which the author identifies himself by the magnanimity of imagination, in that immense renunciation which is the beginning of art. Mr. Joyce's book, to use a convenient philosophical term, is subjective merely, while Douglas's is objective as well; and this objectivity it is which by its presence distinguishes a true work of art from one which is only partially realized, and by its greater power and soundness distinguishes what we call classical art from the art which is generally termed romantic. The characteristic of classical art is that it is so securely objective that whatever circumstance of grief, of turpitude or of horror it may describe, it raises no echo in our ordinary subjective emotions, and is entirely incapable of corrupting us. The characteristic of romantic art is that, in giving us a picture of the world which is indeed æsthetic, it moves these emotions at the same time, and moves them pathetically and agreeably. But the characteristic of Mr. Joyce's art is, one must say, that it

moves these emotions almost exclusively, and that the æsthetic picture which it leaves is in the last degree fragmentary and unsatisfying. In aspiration, in temper, in his view of life, Douglas was classical, but his classicism was plucked with "forced fingers rude"; and to detach himself from his characters he had to employ a coldness which was almost contemptuous, a harshness so grudging that it is a blot on the book. A spirit of unremitting calculation which, even when he has revealed the worst weaknesses of his characters, makes him go a little farther and discover a more abysmal meanness, gives his book a sense of terrible intimacy, where we feel that the last bounds of decency have been passed, and it is painful to look. Nevertheless we are persuaded in spite of our distaste; Douglas's pen, when it is most savage, is solid and just; and his art convinces us, as classical art does.

Yet "The House with the Green Shutters," in spite of the greatness and solidity of its qualities, does not strike one as expressing fully the genius of Douglas. It has truth, imagination, style, architecture; and that confidence which, in a man of Douglas's powers of mind, could come only from a sense of his own genius. All his characters are seen with undeviating objectivity, with deliberate justice; yet there is something strained in his justice, and that is perhaps his chief fault.

His objectivity was not a thing which had ripened of itself and fallen into his lap; he seized upon it violently, tearing himself, seeing that it was himself, when he tore it from experience. There is no serenity, therefore, in his detachment, but a constant separating struggle, which by its hardness imparts to his characters something hateful, the reflection of the deliberate enmity he had to practice to detach himself from them. In spite of his magnanimity, or rather because of it, and because it was attained with such effort, the mark of his reprobation lies on every one of his characters. As he is without serenity, so he is without pity; and his picture is sometimes unbearably grim and hateful. Yet when his imagination was freed by a great scene, and he was delivered for a moment from the struggle to remain aloof, and was carried into the spaces of art with all his faculties consenting, he was indeed a great writer.

Life was hardly kind to him once from his birth, and was most harsh of all in leaving him when fame and the enjoyment of his unfolding genius seemed to lie before him. But the qualities of his genius were so authentic, so solid, and so clearly not in their full maturity when he wrote his first book, that, with better fortune than he had been accustomed to, he must have lived to be the greatest writer of our time.

## IV

### A NOTE ON MR. CONRAD

WHEN "Almayer's Folly," Mr. Conrad's first book, appeared in 1895, the *Spectator* observed with unusual discernment that its author "might become the Kipling of the Malay Archipelago." Mr. Conrad has since then become much more than that, but that his advent should have been proclaimed first by the *Spectator* is both fitting and ironical. It is fitting, for Mr. Conrad is distinctly the Apollonian artist of his time, and, while other writers have prophesied or blasphemed, he has been content to describe. It is ironical, for in the picture of life which he has drawn, there is so much which might have shocked the critic of the *Spectator* could he have but seen it. Mr. Conrad is incomparably the most subtle writer of his age. Even his silence is significant, and it is as certain that his politics and his philosophy are profound as that he has told us nothing about them. He has not, indeed, a "philosophy" at all, like Mr. Wells or Mr. Shaw. Is it because he is too skeptical or because he is



too sure? That one has to ask such a question shows how much lies behind his work.

There are three qualities which stand out in Mr. Conrad's novels: the love of beauty, the insight into the mind, the sense of character. With beauty, the mind and the moral conflict, he is concerned almost exclusively. The passions he has portrayed, it is true, but he has portrayed them preëminently in their effect upon the mind and upon character. In short, he has studied them under glass, and as a psychologist and a moralist. The soul he has not tried to know at all. The conflict in his novels is not the spiritual, but the moral, conflict. And this is what separates him from Dostoyevsky, whom, as a psychologist, he resembles so much. Dostoyevsky showed man in his relation to God; Mr. Conrad shows him in his relation to men and to nature. The former was a mystic, the latter is a rationalist. The one knew human nature, human and divine; the other is interested in human nature simply as human nature. Neither Mr. Conrad nor his characters mentions the name of God, and we feel it is because they would consider it insincere, even theatrical, to do so. There is something admirable in this reticence. Not to say a word more than one means—to say a word or two less, if possible: that is the sure way of making one's words memorable. And Mr. Conrad's words



are memorable, more memorable even than those of Dostoyevsky.

Mr. Conrad, then, is preëminently artist, psychologist and moralist; in other words, he is interested essentially in beauty, the mind, and character. And he is interested perhaps in beauty primarily. He writes by instinctive choice of beautiful things; of the sea, of ships, of tropical skies, and of men whose lives have still the atmosphere of romance around them—of seamen, of barbarians, of South American bandits whose minds have something of the naïve morality of the Renaissance. And he never writes, as Stevenson constantly wrote, with the design of being “romantic.” His beauty is not stuck on. On the contrary, when he describes a scene it strikes us first by its astonishing truth and then by its astonishing beauty. Take this “scene” out of “Nostromo”:

“A fire of broken furniture out of the Intendencia saloons, mostly gilt, was burning in the Plaza, in a high flame swaying right up to the statue of Charles IV. The dead body of a man was lying on the steps of the pedestal, his arms thrown wide open and his sombrero covering his face—the attention, of some friend, perhaps. The light of the flames touched the foliage of the first trees on the Alameda, and played on the end of a side street near by, blocked up by a jumble

of ox-carts and dead bullocks. Sitting on one of the carcasses a lepero, muffled up, smoked a cigarette. It was a truce, you understand. The only other living being in the Plaza besides ourselves was a Cargador, walking to and fro, with a long, bare knife in his hand, like a sentry before the Arcades, where his friends were sleeping. And the only other spot of light in the dark town were the lighted windows of the club, at the corner of the Calle."

What a marvelous picture that is! As a description, what vividness and truth there is in it; as a picture, what masterly composition, what beauty. The beauty in Mr. Conrad's novels is of the highest kind; it springs directly out of truth and justifies for once Keats' celebrated dictum. That amorphous word, "romantic," has been applied monotonously to Mr. Conrad's works. They should be called, more simply, "picturesque." Mr. Conrad writes in pictures, for the pictures come, and what he shows us is not action, but a progression of dissolving scenes, continuous and living, which in the end reflect action and give us a true apprehension of it.

For the accomplishment of this he possesses a fine style, the finest English style of his day, a style perhaps too loaded, too careful, but possessing that last gift called "magic" whereby the object is made to leap before our eyes by a power

beyond mere description. "Nostromo," his greatest exercise in the picturesque, is full of these successes, successes a little laborious, a little too careful, but indubitably successes. The laboriousness in his style accounts for its slow tempo, its fullness: the right word is sought with a rigor so severe that the sentence is sometimes retarded. It is a style like a mosaic, or, rather, like one of those sunsets in which one picture melts into another, insensibly, gorgeously, unerringly, and as by some effect of careful art.

But when Mr. Conrad turns aside from his description of the beautiful, in which there is so much noble passion, he becomes at once the detached student of humanity. In his vision of nature a poet, he is in his investigation of the mind and the passions almost a scientist. To study passion, he might tell us, it is necessary above all to eschew passion. Certainly the passions he shows us are sterilized passions—sterilized by his unique attitude to life. He is interested in life, but he does not love it; and in detaching himself as an artist entirely from life, his interest in it has actually become greater, has become interest and nothing else. Mr. Hugh Walpole says that he finds in Mr. Conrad's work "gusto." But if there is one quality which it lacks, it is exactly gusto. Balzac possessed gusto, Stendhal possessed gusto, and one can imagine

what a glorious immortal figure the latter would have made of Nostromo. Mr. Conrad's temper forbade him to do that. Nostromo is a figure splendidly cut, but he is not a splendid figure: Mr. Conrad will not allow us to deceive ourselves about it for one moment. And that, once more, is because the quality which distinguishes him is not gusto, but interest—interest the most alert, the most entrancing, but still interest. He studies all men; he is carried away by none. Even heroism, which comes so often into his pages, does not elate him. "All claim to special righteousness," he says, "awakens in me that scorn and anger from which a philosophical mind should be free," and his novels are a commentary upon it. He is a student of heroism, he notes how the spirit responds to uncertainty, to danger, to calamity, and he is interested in the responses.

This temper has made him perhaps the greatest psychologist since Dostoyevsky; it has also condemned him to see everything in man except the soul. But other writers and the greatest, it will be said, have not given us the soul in their works. Nevertheless, it is true of Shakespeare's characters, of Fielding's, of Scott's, that, if their relation to God is not *given*, we still know it to be there. They are related to God, although the relation is not expressed; but Mr. Conrad's characters are not related to God at all. It is

because they are not men and women (it is both a censure and a compliment to Mr. Conrad's art to say so) ; they are something much more definite than that: they are specimens of humanity, collected and docketed with incredible finesse. Lord Jim is a specimen, James Waite is a specimen, Heyst is a specimen. But specimens have no soul. The novelists in the classical tradition, Fielding, Scott, Balzac, gave us figures less completely defined than Mr. Conrad's, but they gave the large movement of life. Their characters, in a word, lived in the world. But Mr. Conrad's characters exist insulated by the resolve of the author to study them; they exist in a laboratory of psychology. And the difference is not a difference merely of method. The characters of Fielding carry their background with them because the soul is implicit in them; Mr. Conrad's remain solitary because in them it is not implicit. Everything about them has not, indeed, been observed—that would deny to Mr. Conrad the gift of imagination, which is his in a high degree—but they are things which always *could* be observed.

Yet what a wonderful, and within his limits what a satisfying, psychologist Mr. Conrad is! Nothing is half-done, nothing is guessed; and the most masterly knowledge is squandered quietly on subsidiary characters and episodes. The

French admiral who comes into "Lord Jim" for half an hour and passes out again is realized in every gesture so exactly that he exists for us complete. Observation in Mr. Conrad is united with an almost immaculate perception of the essential, an unexampled finesse in picking out just the word, the aspect, the gesture, that expresses the man or the situation. He selects a gesture as a connoisseur might select a precious stone, and in their setting his gestures have the impressiveness of precious stones. Imagination of the highest kind alone, and not mere observation, could give this unerring felicity in characterization: Mr. Conrad knows—he has not to guess—in what way his characters will act.

The rationalist who peeps out of Mr. Conrad the psychologist, reveals himself completely in Mr. Conrad the moralist. In his ethics it is reason that is moral, and the irrational that is immoral. The moral conflict is therefore the conflict between man in so far as he is a rational creature, and nature as a thing, amoral and unknown. Nature against the conscious, the discovered, the ordered—that is to Mr. Conrad the real antinomy of existence. He gives the highest value, therefore, to the known, to the little in the ocean of the irrational which man has been able to wrest away and precariously to maintain. This alone is certainly good. The



symbol of the immoral is always nature in one of her moods—sometimes the sea, sometimes the impulses in man's breast. The known, the painfully conquered, on the other hand, is simple, so simple as to be commonplace; it consists to Mr. Conrad in the necessity for three qualities, vigilance, courage and fidelity. These are man's highest qualities, and they are also his essential ones, for without them he would cease to be man. There is but a plank, or, at any rate, the timbers of a ship, between mankind and the anarchy of nature. It is the conception of a sincere skeptic and a seaman. Mr. Conrad's heroes are at once fortifying and discouraging; they fight, but they fight with their back to the wall. They have not the right to despair, however; for if they can not win, they may not be defeated! Their endeavor, of course, is not to advance and to conquer—that would appear to Mr. Conrad the most extreme romanticism—but to maintain one or two things without which they would perish. And these are a few truisms. Man voyages over the devouring waste of existence on nothing more stable than a few concepts, a few platitudes.

This conception, so simple in appearance, is, in fact, extremely subtle. Only a profound mind could have given such fundamental meaning to platitude. It is the conception of a skeptic who is sure of one or two things; who accepts the

minimum, who accepts platitude, indisputable platitude, because he is sure of nothing else. He has found two or three planks to put between him and the incommensurable, and that suffices him. And thus while he denies himself hope, as austere he denies himself despair. His hopelessness is not like Mr. Hardy's, a hopelessness without bound; it is a sane hopelessness, a hopelessness full of courage. And his very skepticism must be the source of infinite intellectual enjoyment to him—how many *interesting* questions it must raise! Yes, skepticism like Mr. Conrad's makes one interested in life: it is, perhaps, the source of his own interest in it.



## V

### A NOTE ON DOSTOYEVSKY

THE fascination of the problem of criticism lies in the fact that it can never be solved. We theorize in busy idleness about it, we discover what criticism is, its function, its proper way of approach, its method, even its temper; but nobody pays any attention; every critic uses his own method, and whether or not he has a complete theory to justify it is only academically interesting. Every critical method, the most obvious, the most subtle, the most bizarre, is justified if it is applied well. The criticism that's best administered is best. But when it is well administered it always raises the whole unanswerable question of criticism. It is the distinction of Mr. Janko Lavrin's book on Dostoyevsky<sup>1</sup> that it does this. His method, which he calls "psycho-criticism," is theoretically and still more, practically, a dangerous method of criticism. One can fall more disastrously in it than it is possible to fall on the standardized plains of classical appreciation; but

<sup>1</sup> "Dostoyevsky and His Creation: A Psycho-Critical Study." Janko Lavrin. London: Collins.

when we see one chasm after another being leaped, as we do in Mr. Lavrin's book, we are more exhilarated than we could be by more usual literary spectacles. It is hard to imagine an American or an English critic taking the risks which Mr. Lavrin takes and carrying them off triumphantly. Before a figure like Dostoyevsky our attitude is a guaranteed acceptance, followed by an indication of minor blemishes; but any piercing to the heart of the mystery is interdicted, or rather not even imagined. Now, this is precisely what Mr. Lavrin attempts to do, by a psychological analysis of all the documents, personal and imaginative, in which the spirit of Dostoyevsky is embalmed.

How dangerous this may be one shudders to think. The danger of analysis in criticism is that one always reduces—and must always reduce—one's subject not to his terms but to one's own. One must, therefore, be in some sense on a level with one's subject. The psychological critic who is continually looking upward has failed at the beginning; he is only an inferior kind of astrologer, turning the stars into dryasdust. Mr. Lavrin does not for one moment do this; he moves among the problems of Dostoyevsky as if they were, in his own sphere, his own. This is not presumption (only Mr. Gosse would consider it to be so), for the problems of Dostoy-

evsky are universal problems and belong, therefore, whether we know it or not, to us all. And with what daring clarity Mr. Lavrin writes of them! I say "daring," for there are few writers yet who would dare to be clear on such an enigmatical genius as Dostoyevsky.

Mr. Lavrin defines Dostoyevsky as "a transcendental or symbolic realist, who sees in actuality only a veil of the inner reality." He looks at actuality for flashes of the thing it conceals. He seeks for these, Mr. Lavrin says,

not in "normal" everyday trivialities, but rather in digressions from them, more—in a deliberate exaggeration of these very digressions. That explains and justifies the "pathology" of Dostoyevsky's heroes. It is by straining the real and the normal to their utmost limits, to the point of abnormality, that he tries to fathom the essence and divine the riddles of the normal itself. His "pathology" is not the end but the means. In the sick and the abnormal he often finds, not the opposite, but rather an amplifying of the normal.

What a relief it is to read that, after the pæans of those who accept—and canonize—Dostoyevsky as a pathological novelist. Yet, incisive as Mr. Lavrin is here, he makes a mistake in saying that Dostoyevsky sought for the abnormal. No, he found it infallibly; and he could have found nothing else. It is his clearness in realms

where other writers, and these the greatest, are vague or "poetical," that makes his characters abnormal, that evokes abnormality as a sort of necessity. Every man, seen distinctly enough, is abnormal, for the normal is only a name for the undifferentiated, for a failure to see the inescapable nuance. For instance when Versilov exclaims: "I can with perfect convenience experience two opposite feelings at one and the same time, and not, of course, through my own will," we feel ourselves in the presence of something exceptional and even strange; but nevertheless it is not the capacity for feeling "two opposite feelings at one and the same time" that is exceptional, for that is the universal if often unconscious experience of mankind: no, what is exceptional is the clarity with which this is recognized by Dostoyevsky's characters and expressed in Dostoyevsky's art. Dostoyevsky wrote of the unconscious as if it were conscious: that is in reality the reason why his characters seem "pathological," while they are only visualized more clearly than any other figures in imaginative literature.

This capacity to "experience two opposite feelings at one and the same time" is at the centre of Dostoyevsky's art, religion and psychology; and his whole work is the demonstration of a sort of unconscious theology within us, a sort

of religion working in the subconscious minds of men like an ineluctable process, and demanding an end, a solution, a poise, a harmony: Absolute Value or God. Now, it is the character of the unconscious that it can not rest satisfied with, can not even conceive, the relative; it demands with all its power the unconditioned, that and nothing less. Nothing is more astonishing to western Europeans, nurtured on relative conceptions of morality, than Dostoyevsky's refusal to admit that the Good may be useful as well as good, that there are, along with higher reasons, politic reasons for being virtuous; that, in fact, people must acknowledge morality or else everything precious in civilization will perish. Yet all this, impatient as it sometimes makes us, and especially in this age when it is overemphasized, is nothing less than the other side of the truth: this is the realm of the conscious, the practical, the possible, the incarnate. Yet this half of terrestrial life Mr. Lavrin, either out of reverence for Dostoyevsky or out of agreement with him, seems to ignore. To him, as to Dostoyevsky, either an Absolute Value exists, in which case we must obey it, or there is nothing whatever to obey, and "all things are allowable," as Ivan Karamazov believed and feared. There is not such a thing as human will; there are only self-will and the will of God. In a certain sense, of

course, this is true, for even unbelievers believe it: the tremendous thing, difficult to explain, is that Dostoyevsky, in pages more intellectual than imaginative, ignored the very things with which the intellect is concerned: the organization of societies into States, the usefulness and possibility of things generally. To him, even intellectually, the realm of practical reality in which the will of God and man's will are intermingled, or rather torturingly entangled, was worse than nonexistent. He and his characters abhor the State too much even to fight against it. They think and feel as if it did not exist. What is excusable—or rather without need of excuse—in other writers, is in Dostoyevsky a fundamental defect. *Emma Bovary* was artistically justified in her silence about society, because she was a creature of desire and not of thought; but Dostoyevsky's characters are tormented with universal questions, with problems in which the existence of concrete societies is at every turn implicated, and yet he passed society by! "Either an Absolute Value or an absolute void!" says Mr. Lavrin, and postulates in a sentence the central thought of Dostoyevsky. But one feels that great as Dostoyevsky was in every direction—as a poet, as a psychologist, as a thinker—he arrived too soon, and without passing through the

complete human circle, at this ultimate question.

But one must recognize here the inescapable fate of race, for it is the characteristic of the Slav race that it passes by the intermediate manifestations of the spirit which to western Europeans are so interesting and so human, and goes immediately to ultimate things. Mr. Lavrin quotes the story told by the Nihilist Verhoven-sky "in a jesting tone" of how, during a discussion on atheism, "one old grizzled stager of a captain sat mum, not saying a word. All at once he stands up in the middle of the room, and says aloud, as though speaking to himself: 'If there is no God, how can I be a captain then?' He took up his cap and went out, flinging up his hands." The combined naïveté and profundity of that, one can find in no literature but the Russian; that attitude, that conviction, is Slavonic; and the old captain's exclamation expresses the whole of Dostoyevsky's attitude. One says only once more that Dostoyevsky was a Slav when one says that, holding this attitude, he was never planted firmly upon it. It is not merely that he desired to believe in God and could not: no, he believed in God and at the same time disbelieved in him, and he wished to have both his belief and his unbelief. This is the difference between him and his great antitype in Europe, Pascal. These



two men battled literally from opposite sides for the same goal. The transcendental torment of Pascal was that he believed, made himself believe, while still he could not know, that God existed. But Dostoyevsky knew that God existed; yet he could not believe in him. "If any one could prove to me," he says in one of his letters, "that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth." The truth here is simply rational belief. A fundamental knowledge of God's existence exalts and tortures Dostoyevsky's most atheistical figures, his murderers, harlots and idiots; but their sceptical intellect, or perhaps something still more enigmatical and still deeper, denies them a belief in what they know. This failure, this torment is their essential sin; compared with this all their other transgressions, theft, adultery, murder, are as nothing to them. They are not only sinners, but transcendental sinners; beside them there are in literature no other sinners. The sins they commit are intellectual and universal sins; they sin like saints, nay, like angels of light. But when they sin, their knowledge of God remains with them. In hell they are spiritual; in heaven they are bestial. And wherever they may be, in the brothel or in the madhouse; and whatever they may do, whether it is murder or



some act of ultimate love, they feel within themselves always "the capacity to experience two opposite feelings at one and the same time." "A knowledge that they were depraved as well as noble," it is said of the Karamazovs, "was necessary to them."

Mr. Lavrin is incisive and true about those characters in Dostoyevsky's novels in whom the force of rational disbelief becomes so strong that while holding still to an intuition of God they rebel against him.

The chief characteristic common to all these [he says] is the protest of the individual consciousness against the vile and vicious order of the Cosmos. They diverge, however, at the inner conception of this will. A "mutineer" who realizes God behind the universe becomes a God-struggler; when he feels behind it only a dark Power, an unconscious senseless complex of blind forces, he becomes a cosmic Nihilist.

Of the former state he says finely that

it imposes two difficult conditions: a permanent inner tension and a complete belief in God. The strength of the God-struggler consists in his belief in God; his weakness and danger in his doubt of him. For, as soon as he becomes conscious that God does not exist, his rebellious will loses the object against which it needs to strive. Against "unconscious blind forces" he can not fight, for the simple reason that they are unconscious,

that is to say, irresponsible, and, therefore, not guilty. Consequently his former struggle against God becomes a wrestle with the void—with that aimless, cosmic void which negates any real assertion of life and individuality. Hence, a God-struggler is and must of necessity be religious. His passionate repudiation of God is of a religious character, and it has nothing in common with those "scientific" atheists whose consciousness never rises to the terrible problem of God.

I quote this passage because it shows what I mean when I say that Mr. Lavrin moves among the problems of Dostoyevsky as if they were his own. So sure is he here that sometimes he speaks—it is no excess of praise or of criticism—almost like one of Dostoyevsky's characters. But although he has submerged himself in the terrific world of Dostoyevsky, and moves there with Slavonic pliability, he has pulled himself out again, and, standing on dry land, with Europe at his back, has passed a judgment. It is his performance of these two things which makes his book so pregnant. We lose something tremendous if at some time or other we do not lose ourselves in Dostoyevsky; for he was one of those writers by whom we can not but find ourselves again, and find ourselves enriched and fortified. This Mr. Lavrin realizes; yet he is not altogether carried away, perhaps not quite enough carried away. "Neither Dostoyevsky nor any of his

really important heroes," he says, "attained a complete and final synthesis. Most of them remained on the plane of inner differentiation." And, in the last few pages: "The fact should be once more pointed out that in his social, as well as religious, *credo* there was more of will to believe than of belief itself." This is true, this should perhaps be said; but I think Mr. Lavrin insists upon it too much. Who has ever attained "a complete and final synthesis"? In what human figure has belief not been more a will to believe than anything else? All that one can say of Dostoyevsky, or of the greatest man, is that he strove, that his struggle was great, that in it he realized himself, and that the cause, the centre and the meaning of his struggle was that intuition, that fleeting but unshakable realization of truth, which is the most inviolable mark of human greatness. This is human life *sub specie æternitatis*; this is tragedy, religion, art; and in his realization of this, if not perfectly in his expression of it, Dostoyevsky is in the rank in which we set Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe.

## VI

### A NOTE ON IBSEN

MR. JANKO LAVRIN'S "psycho-critical" study of Ibsen <sup>1</sup> follows closely upon his book on Dostoyevsky. He has still, I believe, to write on Nietzsche and Tolstoy, a peculiarly happy choice, for in these four men is comprehended the European culture of the last fifty years—the culture, and at the same time the failure to attain culture in that time. On all these writers, except Tolstoy in his first great period, there is something disfiguring, the mark of a rationalism which, it is true, was always enlisted against rationalism. In every one of them art was blasted, and from inside, by a necessity to insinuate into it something less triumphant than itself: the "problems" of our time, which are so defacing, so unlike, in their search for unsightly things, the problems of more human eras. All these writers, and Nietzsche by virtue of his "Also Sprach Zarathustra" not least, were artists, but there was among them no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no figure free and well-

<sup>1</sup> "Ibsen and His Creation: A Psycho-Critical Study." Janko Lavrin. London: Collins.

grown. Flaubert, the most perfect artist who wrote in their time, was not in the same rank as they; he managed in that age to be a good writer by never rising to the point where problems and imperfect art were, things being what they were, the fate of very great men. Like Turgenev he had definitely to specialize himself to avoid greatness and to attain perfection. What were the causes which made the greatest writers of the last half-century less organic than they would have been in any other age it would be idle in the preface to a short essay to try to discover. I hope Mr. Lavrin will give some attention to it in the fifth volume of his work.

His "Ibsen" is an advance in style and method on his "Dostoyevsky," being more finished and more athletic. It is entirely different, however, in its temper, which sometimes sharpens to bad temper. The explanation lies before us. Mr. Lavrin is a Slav, and Dostoyevsky must remain to him, in spite of himself, a Slav as well as a great writer. By Ibsen temperamentally (and what does that not amount to?) he is repelled, and his criticism, though fair, is only as fair as a defect of sympathy permits. But even antipathy, when it is not blind, and Mr. Lavrin is never blind, is interesting and, as a means for discovering certain truths, valuable. There is more radical criticism of Ibsen in Mr.

Lavrin's book than in any other I have read. To begin with, he is never in danger of taking Ibsen's "ideas" seriously. "His diagnosis of the great Invalid called Modern Society," he says, "is always penetrating; but his prescriptions are neither original nor daring." There is really nothing more to be said about that. How the world could ever have listened without a smile to such naïvetés as "I wish to see every man in the land a nobleman," "The minority is always right," or "The strongest man is he who stands alone," remains to this day a mystery. Set beside a single profound and definite aphorism of Nietzsche or a chance remark of one of Dostoyevsky's characters, these avowals sound unbearably loose and empty. The ideas in Ibsen's dramas were the ideas of any modern thinker; yet he accepted them, and uttered them, as inspirations. He built his plays upon them, taking as his themes the subjects which any foolhardy mediocrity might have chosen. Here he was worse than false; he was middling. But after admitting this Mr. Lavrin is once more not led astray.

Ibsen's plays as a whole [he says] are as far from being dramatized treatises as they are from being dramatized "tendency." The solution of this riddle is simple; instead of illustrating and preaching his ideas through drama, Ibsen individualized them, incarnated them in

living characters. He went from ideas to reality, not in order to violate or distort reality by applying ready-made formulæ to it, but to make the ideas *live* in a new and transmuted reality. This proceeding is exactly opposite to that of the "tendency"-writers. Instead of giving us plays with a moral imposed upon them, he embodies in them their own organic philosophy.

Yet he was not always successful; he was indeed astonishingly less successful than we generally imagine. When there was a hole in one of his characters it was his habit, like the amiable people whom Nietzsche hated so extraordinarily, to fill it up with a "modern idea." In spite of his art the themes of almost all his social dramas remain nothing more than absurd. In "Emperor and Galilean," his "world-historic drama," he was not profound, he was not even shallow. There has surely never been a man with genius equal to his so capable of the kind of seriously intended *gaucherie* which hundreds of lesser writers have never had to struggle to avoid. His very courage was here his worst friend. Nothing daunted him, not even good taste. In "Ghosts," one of his happiest themes, his intrepidity in bad taste fatally ruined the effect. He was not satisfied to make the drama terrible; he had to make it disagreeable as well. The evil of bad taste in a work of art is almost irremediable. It draws us up continually; it pre-



vents us from seeing in its æsthetic integrity the conception of the writer.

Yet Ibsen was a great poet, and nothing can be more interesting than to discover, if that is possible, the cause of his degeneration and final impotence. Mr. Lavrin finds this in his failure to attain "a religious consciousness," or, I should like to add, an artistic one, for in art, too, there is salvation. Lacking the religious sense Ibsen had nothing, Mr. Lavrin says, but moral ideals; and there the drama of his downfall begins.

There were two Ibsens, for while he sought as a hopeful idealist and optimistic "philosopher," his innate skepticism was always busy dissecting, analyzing, and paralyzing. . . . Taken as a whole, Ibsen's writing was mainly conditioned by these two antagonistic tendencies, although by his incredible skill he generally succeeded in welding them into more or less unitary work of art. . . . The closer Ibsen looked at the enigma of man and life the more haunted he was by it; and whenever he sought to find a safer refuge in "positive" ideals or ideas, his inner honesty compelled him to undermine, sooner or later, his own refuge. He was not a convinced idealist, but only a Tantalus of ideals.

This is the reason why "The Wild Duck" had to follow "An Enemy of the People," and "When We Dead Awaken," "The Master Builder."



He was never quite sure what to affirm, for in the course of time his "self-anatomy" stripped one ideal after the other to their bare skeletons. And preferring to be untrue to the ideals rather than to himself, Ibsen gradually arrived at those lonely "heights" where his soul began to freeze in the thin and icy atmosphere of its own "spiritual emancipation." Instead of the great Resurrection Day, he found at the end of his journey emptiness and the cold silence of the desert.

This is Mr. Lavrin's judgment, and the brilliance and truth of it are indisputable. One is carried away with it, and on reflection must agree with it. But in its implications I think there is something not properly human.

What is it that interests us in great men and gives us satisfaction in their existence? That they triumph? That they attain a solution for their lives or for life? That they end their days on the summit of a peak, instead of getting into "a tight place where you can neither get forward nor back" as Ibsen did? Mr. Lavrin requires too stringently for every great man, it seems to me, his own particular pinnacle, his self-built pedestal. He desires the great not to live, but to prevail, and to prevail in a special fashion. But every genuine triumph is obscure, and not to be weighed except by the attainer. Let us turn to Ibsen himself. "To create is to hold a severe trial of oneself." "My task has been the *de-*

*scription of humanity.*" "Yes—I must confess that the only thing I love about liberty is the struggle for it." These confessions, disclosing a world of intense experience, tell us more of Ibsen's attainment than Mr. Lavrin's analysis, brilliant as it is; for they show, what indeed does not need to be shown, that Ibsen did attain the only thing possible of attainment by him, and that he did this not at the end of his life merely, but all through it. He spent his life, because desire and necessity ordained it, in a struggle for freedom; he fought to the end and there found the "tight place where you can neither get forward nor back"; and there, by necessity once more, his struggle had to cease. But there is no doubt that he found satisfaction in the battle; strife was his *métier* and his destiny; and in that is the explanation of his success by his own lights and of his failure as a poet. He was too much a warrior, and a warrior in, alas, too commonplace lists, to continue to be a poet after he had expressed himself in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt." "*Gerade dem Helden ist das Schöne aller Dinge Schwerstes,*" says Nietzsche, "*unerringbar ist das Schöne allen heftigem Willen.*" And Ibsen's will bit into everything it could find in the life around him, eating like an insatiable dragon the slime, the commonest and most monstrous things, when it could find nothing else; but in doing so it exer-

cised and emancipated itself. "To create is to hold a severe trial of oneself," and Ibsen's life was a constant putting of himself in the lists, a more and more severe and unsightly trial of his will against "ghosts" of which he was never afraid, although they were too great for him.

The division in Ibsen's nature, the existence side by side within him of "the hopeful idealist" and "the dissecting skeptic" was no doubt, as Mr. Lavrin says, the sign of his weakness; but nevertheless how rich it was in compensations. The Ibsenian conception of Fate, one of the most interesting in all literature, was fashioned by the action of one of these persons on the other; and that conception, it seems to me, opens a realm which Mr. Lavrin has not surveyed in his acute and truthful book. Ibsen did incarnate modern ideas in his characters, it is true, but how little that tells us when their whole drama consists in an emancipation from modern ideas. They start with modern ideas, but their development begins with the discovery of that within them which is more essential than an idea: the inward deed whereby they "become what they are." Ibsen's dramas are not dramas of the soul, as it is generally said, but of this inward fate. The problem of his characters is to discover how they can act out of the real and the necessary, and find that affirmation which shall be at once free and true.

It led them to many and diverse fates: Nora to nothing more than whim or theory has led many women since; Rosmer and Hedda to suicide; Ellida to happiness. But the solution is always personal, always the individual rule which we call an exception; and nothing can be more absurd than to debate on general grounds whether Nora was justified in leaving her husband and children, or whether Solness should have gone to the top of his house. To do so is to ignore the only thing that is of dramatic or spiritual value in Ibsen's already too ideological dramas: the realization of individual necessity and truth.

There were, indeed, in the end, only two ideas behind the creative manifestations of Ibsen's genius, and these not modern: the ideas of Truth and of Freedom. "The spirits of Truth and of Freedom," says Lona Hessel, "these are the Pillars of Society," and these were also the pillars which supported Ibsen's dramas. They were less ideas than "spirits" as he called them. His "truth" was not metaphysical, but so concrete that taken from its context it must appear commonplace: simple truthfulness. His "freedom" was nothing more than action in accordance with the discovered truth, involving chiefly therefore the power to stand alone and the right to develop from an inner centre. This act of discovery and obedience was to Ibsen Fate, and a volume might

be written upon the difference between it and Fate as conceived by Latin writers such as Stendhal and Mérimée. Both these men had very strongly an apprehension of Fate, but it was Fate of passion unfolding unerringly like a natural process, unthinking, or if thinking, thinking at the dictate of passion. The characters of Stendhal are capable of introspection, but the introspection always "goes into" their action. They never doubt themselves, they only deliberate on what is the best to be done in a problem of love, and it is not the goodness or the truth of their course that concerns them, but its effectualness. To Ibsen Fate is the very opposite of, or rather the emancipation from, this. He did not desire to feel, but to will, inevitably. This was, however, a problem and a conscious task, which he sought to give the infallibility of unconscious things. Feeling was not to him, as it was to Stendhal, something right, but, on the contrary, infinitely deceitful, a problem and not a phenomenon. But Will may become inevitable, and to make it inevitable was to him emancipation. By his occupation with these realities, Ibsen is more interesting humanly than Stendhal, though æsthetically he is less satisfying. He was not concerned with passion, and its nuances therefore simply were not perceived by him; and there is no more puerile concept of love extant than that which he essayed in

"Love's Comedy." In every sense he had less love even than Goethe attributed to Platen. But in his intuition of the truth and necessity of the moral nature of mankind he was great.

It was in his poetry, however, that Ibsen was greatest, and we are interested, whatever Mr. Lavrin may say, not in his psychological antinomies, but in that. "Brand" is the only great tragedy in European literature since "Faust"; and "Peer Gynt" is the greatest poetic comedy since Shakespeare. It is the most severe criticism that I can pass on Mr. Lavrin's book to say that after reading it one would never have suspected this to be the case. He is unduly obsessed with Ibsen's failure to attain a "synthesis," but to talk of that with these two poems beside one is spiritually pedantic, for these are attainment, these are the synthesis which we call art. If Ibsen had not written them we should not have known he was great, and there would have been no reason why Mr. Lavrin should include him in a survey of European culture. These two poems are, it is true, more imperfect than any other poems of the same rank; they are vitiated by a resolve to write a devastating encyclopædia as well as a drama; but nevertheless by their large and easy grasp of human nature, their exuberance and certainty of utterance, by a truth in them, not attained, not studied, but instinctive

and immediate, they are in the same rank as "Faust" and "Henry IV." They are not so great and so sure as these, but they have the same accent and are of the same kin. They are among the least poems in the first rank, rather than among the greatest in the second. Ibsen wrote only two great works, and that is because the age in which he lived, and he himself most stridently in that age, demanded something more, or rather something else, from its poets than poetry. So far as I can judge from Mr. Lavrin's book, we still do this, and Ibsen would have been as badly off to-day as he was fifty years ago. The chief value of Mr. Lavrin's book is in its analysis of the spiritual problems of Ibsen's time and of our own. In these matters he is better equipped than any other critic whom I have read; and the subject is a great one.



## VII

### A NOTE ON FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Although I am in my forty-fifth year and have published about fifteen books, no one in Germany has yet succeeded in producing even a moderately good review of one of my works. . . . There have been evil and slanderous hints enough about me, and in the papers, both scholarly and unscholarly, the prevailing attitude is one of ungoverned animosity—but how is it that no one feels insulted when I am abused? And all these years no comfort, no drop of human sympathy, not a breath of love.

So NIETZSCHE wrote to his friend Seydlitz in 1888, a little before he went mad. For more than a decade the complexion of his philosophy, his illnesses and the life which they imposed upon him, and perhaps the fastidiousness of his temper, had withdrawn him from any permanent and immediate friendship. He had long before broken with Wagner, the one man to whom he had given his love; and there was no one of sufficient capacity about him to give him countenance

in the campaign which, with open eyes, he was carrying on against the values of two thousand years. He felt more and more alone, living with an idea which the silence of a continent made monstrous; an idea which general discussion or even a little recognition might have modified, humanizing, as a result, and perhaps eventually saving from his final calamity the author as well. The only conceivable end was madness for a man who had held an idea so monstrous to himself, in the centre of universal silence, racked by bodily pain, with an occasional hasty and feverish convalescence, and involved year by year more deeply in a gloom which thickened to the end. Of the fourth book of "Also Sprach Zarathustra," Nietzsche had only twenty copies printed, and of these he could find readers only for seven. So much genius, such an intense consciousness of a mission which he eventually came to regard as the greatest of all time; and yet "no drop of human sympathy," not a word cast into the silence, or only words so thin and few as to make it seem more forlorn: all this Nietzsche, the greatest spirit of his time, had to endure for twenty years. The spectacle is not only pitiable; it is astonishing. The Germany of Nietzsche's generation had not such a galaxy of great writers that one more or fewer would not be noticed. And the prose which he flung

into that phlegmatic era was not forbidding, had not the superficially uninviting look which good prose sometimes has; it was, on the contrary, the most seductive prose that had ever been written in German, the most full of enticing grace, of wit, of nuance, of every kind of literary resource. In sheer accomplishment, in the easy achievement of effects never dreamt of in Germany before, it was a continual *tour de force*. But Germany had no ear for it, and Nietzsche went mad beneath the burden of the unprecedented message which he had to deliver, and which all his literary resources could not make carry to the tiny bounds of the most restricted literary circle of his own land.

In Mr. Lavrin's book,<sup>1</sup> the third of his series on European culture in the last generation, there is, I must confess, very little sense of the tragedy of a great nature. On Ibsen and Dostoyevsky he showed both human understanding and intellectual acuteness: on Nietzsche he is a little inhuman, and the spirit of a great man does not transpire through his categories. His analysis is not truly interpretive, as it was in his study of Dostoyevsky, but reductive; and he has shown that a tremendous spirit can be reduced to a very uninteresting common denominator. He has organized the chaos of Nietzsche into an or-

<sup>1</sup> "Nietzsche." Janko Lavrin. London: Collins.

dered star in which the most sanguine will see no signs of dancing; and his analysis, more persistent here than it has been before, is also more lifeless. There are fewer flashes of that psychological vision which delighted us in his former work; and, on the other hand, the hypothesis upon which he "explains" Nietzsche is more mechanically worked out. There are, of course, acute and even illuminating passages, which show that Mr. Lavrin is at home in the atmosphere created by Nietzsche; but his method, perhaps by his too entire confidence in it, produces results far more disappointing than we were entitled to expect; and the crying fault of the book is that, written about a great man, it gives one very little sense of his greatness.

The fault of Mr. Lavrin's attitude, signs of which had begun to appear already in his "Ibsen," is that in showing what his great figures did not attain he ignores in a certain degree what they attained. He deplores that they were not this, and forgets that they were that. His books are, accordingly, a record of their failure; but "success and failure" as Nietzsche himself said, "are merely responses"; and if this is true anywhere it is most of all true in literature, where the expression of a sense of failure may be more lasting than a confessed feeling of success. All this is not to deny that there is any

value in criticism which, like Mr. Lavrin's, shows for what reason great men have failed to attain their highest realization; on the contrary, one can not imagine any critical task more important than just this. But it needs in an unusual degree a positive attitude, a capacity for recognizing and almost for being surprised at what men, imperfect as they are, have done; and with this quality Mr. Lavrin seems to me not to be sufficiently endowed. He demands of each of his subjects that he should attain a certain state of mind; that he should hold, permanently one would almost think, the synthesis of his antitheses; and that is an impossible condition, life being what it is, a struggle in which victory is succeeded by failure. And this synthesis how are we to know? Mr. Lavrin is satisfied only with the strictest evidence; he must have the word of the author, in his letters or his works. This is asking both too much or too little; for there is no one who has lived in constant reconciliation with himself, and without the bitterness of doubt and disintegration; and, moreover, personal testimony is here the most unreliable thing in the world. One must take a more indirect way to the truth, and in the following passage from Nietzsche, quoted by Mr. Lavrin, there is surely all the evidence one can ask for of an ecstatic state, in which all the faculties are harmonized: "How differently the

divine has revealed itself every time to me! . . . So many strange things have passed before me in those timeless moments, which fall into a man's life as if they came from the moon, and in which he no longer knows how old he is or how young he still may be!" In that, and in hundreds of other passages breathing the same spirit, there is surely enough to make us believe that Nietzsche attained his synthesis, if not in perpetuity—and who has ever done so?—then when he could.

Aside from these faults, which, if they mar, by no means destroy, the interest or the value of his book, Mr. Lavrin has dealt very illuminatingly with the problem of Nietzsche. In showing the source of Nietzsche's errors in his self-deceptions, Mr. Lavrin has damaged many of the theories which find their most ordered expression in "The Will to Power." We shall probably have to throw away half the more systematic part of Nietzsche's thought. It may be said of him, as Matthew Arnold said of Emerson, that "he was a man of great thoughts, but not a great thinker." What did not come to him in pure intuition was generally unreliable and sometimes absurd. His transvaluation of values; his interpretation of morality in terms of the Will to Power; his particular definition of decadence; these have, in spite of the passion with which he stated them, an appearance a little pedantic. The belief, prevalent

for some time in a little circle, and held by Nietzsche himself, that Christianity had sustained an irreparable reverse, a defeat which would alter the fate of the world for the next two thousand years, in "The Will to Power" and "Also Sprach Zarathustra," is for us now only a curious piece of literary history. The Superman is no longer an ideal, but a character in fiction. All this may be freely admitted. Yet how much poorer our vision of life to-day would be had Nietzsche never written about Christianity, morality and the Superman. He brought a new atmosphere into European thought, an atmosphere cold, glittering and free; and any thinker in our time who has not breathed in it has, by that accident, some nuance of mediocrity and timidity which is displeasing.

It was Nietzsche's fate to be always more true and interesting than his philosophy. However unsound his thesis might be, he uttered truths in supporting it which came clean out of reality, so that he seemed sometimes to hear life itself speaking. This union of something artificial and something true in his nature is what makes him so difficult and so interesting. When he was most unconditional in his thought, he was never quite unconditional in his spirit. For example, he wrote much and greatly on love, and he loved mankind; but his love was never quite what mankind call love, and he loved always with conditions. That



being so, he had to stage-manage existence and to create a theatre in which the drama of his love could be played out: that drama of a love which was not to be like any other kind of love; a love not of acceptance, but of distinctions; a love which was to choose its objects, a fastidious love: a love not quite in the grand style, in the style which said itself once for all in the words, "He sends his rain on the just and the unjust." Nietzsche tried to regain the significance of his conception, and to stamp it with the great human manner, by bringing into relief an aspect of love which in his unhappy time was lost: its procreative aspect. But one feels that this was at the same time part of an attempt, unnecessary and petty, to distinguish himself—as if it were worth his while—from the Positivists and the rest of that dismal crew. This need to distinguish himself from people from whom he was already *ipso facto* distinguished, was evidently a fatality from which his fastidious spirit would not exempt him. He was always a little uncritical, except with Schopenhauer and Wagner, in his choice of opponents. He rarely practiced his own sagacious counsel, not to oppose oneself directly to one's enemies, but to outshine them with one's light; and he took far too seriously movements which have since sunk into oblivion and would have done so by a natural process had he never raised his pen against them.

To fight against a shallow vulgarity of thought which will die in a few years of its own feebleness shows a lack of that sense for permanent and essential things which only a thinker or an artist who has mastered his own chaos can securely hold. It compromised Nietzsche's utterance to the end.

Yet, in spite of the irrelevancies into which he was drawn, he was at the centre of truth in his conception of love as procreation. All the great ideals of love, spiritual and carnal, have been procreative ideals: "By their fruits shall ye know them." But, once more, Nietzsche insinuated into his conception one of those idiosyncracies of his which are so daring and original, the idiosyncrasy of a great man; and perverted the simple human validity of an eternal and necessary thing. He sought not merely, as Christ did, to work through love—the love which, whatever journalists may say, is always there, just as its opposite is always there—and by means of it, the great creative principle, to overcome its antagonist, the principle of negation; he did not try to make use of spiritual powers as he found them, accepting the instinctive wisdom of all religious teachers: he sought to create a new kind of love, a kind of love never known before on earth or in heaven, a love to be evoked out of the void or out of a theory of existence held by himself, and so little comprehensible to men that it had to be newly defined and

tirelessly distinguished. Nietzsche desired not only that men after his day should feel, and, with Christ, deeply; he desired that they should feel in a certain way, in a way which history and the experience of the human race have not demonstrated to be natural to man. When Christ says "Love one another," one can hardly affirm that everybody understands him; but one can at least say that the less there is of an artificial hypothesis between one and the saying, the more fully one is likely to comprehend it; whereas, when Nietzsche speaks of the "new love," the discovery of which, wrongly perhaps, he regarded as his greatest thought, some sort of intellectual construction is necessary to put us in the attitude in which we can experience it. Nietzsche, the lifelong fighter against rationalism, was himself a dangerous kind of rationalist: having reasoned to a conclusion, he could feel towards it an emotion almost lyrical, and could give it the seductiveness of an intuition. He perceived that procreation was an aspect of love, that it was, indeed, in a certain sense, its end; and seeing this, he felt, as a philosopher, as a creature more rational than he imagined, that this alone was serious and without the stupidity of human feeling; and he was not content merely to say that we know love by its fruits, he said that we must love for the sake of the fruits of love. He tried to constrain love, not holding with his

predecessors that love can only be awakened and inspired. He made terms with love.

Affirmer of life as he styled himself, he made terms with life also. This he had to conceal, and from himself first of all; but with what passion, with what desperate intellectual violence he had to rearrange life first in order to affirm it. This necessity was no doubt at the root of his deep affection for Pascal, a man whose beliefs were so antagonistic to his own. Both were men who stood in almost untenable positions, who had to convince themselves, out of some paradoxical, perhaps self-antithetical need, of the truth of certain things in which they could not believe. All their intellectual finesse, all that subtlety which in them approached cunning, was needed to keep them on the needle-point of their attitude; and their minds, if terribly, almost beautifully, distorted in the process, attained also a marvelous, an abnormal, development. To "affirm" humanity Nietzsche had first to destroy almost all the things in which humanity for twenty centuries had believed: to destroy them, or to "interpret" them. He would not accept Europe until he convinced himself that he could "shape" it; and in his faith that he or his disciples could shape Europe he tumbled down awkwardly, romantically, desperately, out of his fastidious intellectualism. As a shaper of Europe Nietzsche has been less effectual, it is certain,

than the late Lord Northcliffe, a man whom he would hardly have approved. The complete loss of his intelligence here, at the bidding of a hope for the appearance of a set of natural aristocrats capable of binding the monster Europe, was the final proof of the desperateness of his faith, and of the impossibilities he had to swallow before he could swallow what was for him the real impossibility, human nature as it is. Yet here, where his delusions reveal him as a man human-all-too-human, and not above our pity, there shines, from out the thrice-traversed circle of self-deception, a great mind. On the nature of love, of great men and great passions, Nietzsche said things which are imperishable; things which in beauty and truth will never be surpassed.

The unique thing about Nietzsche's self-delusion is that, unlike that of other men, it was never ignoble; it always appeared in some beautiful and exalted shape, and gave to his life an atmosphere almost of inviolateness. He deceived himself, not, as lesser men do, in his own service, but in the service of an ideal which, having seen, he felt, with that unconditional rejection of compromises which was one of his chief qualities, he must live.

He was thoroughly impatient of meanness, of the habit of self-excuse which with the majority of men alone makes their existence endurable; he would not admit the necessity for anything vulgar

in his life, and eventually what was not raised to some æsthetic form which satisfied him was, under the pressure of his habit of nobility, securely hidden away. He felt evil obscurely within him; but he could not abide the mean and awry shape with which several centuries of general timidity have endowed evil; and out of a necessity to vindicate himself he invested it with greatness, as another man who would not derogate from his personal integrity, Milton, had done before him; and his newly discovered conviction in his greatness in evil as in good restored to him that unsullied intuition of himself without which he could not live. Yet this intuition, much as it gives us of the true Nietzsche, the most beautiful figure in modern literature, was not absolute intuition; it was also an image, a *Bild*, a veil of deception woven over the real pattern of his being. "My monsters have become singing birds and angels," said Zarathustra; but of Nietzsche it might be said that his monsters were not quite monsters, and that they never quite turned into angels. That being so, he suffered subterraneously and mythically, enduring things which were inexplicable to him, and which, but for his magnanimity in facing life, would have appeared to him unjust; dreaming of a toad which he tried thrice to swallow, and which thrice stuck in his throat, and of a snake



which crawled into the open mouth of a young shepherd.

The highly astonishing thing is that, confronted with appearances so horrible, he maintained an attitude of undeviating self-reverence. It was a characteristic of his to treat as something important, and demanding his own respect and that of others, whatever happened to him. In this he was once more like Milton; and this attitude is the infallible sign of that instinctive nobility which in all ages has been rare, and of which in our own age Nietzsche is the solitary example. Tragically deceived as he was in some ways about himself, he could with fitness speak about "heroism without witnesses," for throughout his life it was a virtue which he practiced with an extreme simplicity of motive which raised him above the other men of his time.

He has left us some criticism of the first rank; a body of observation on life, religion and morality which will be valid as long as men feel these things and think about them; an exercise in rhythmic prose which must continue to astonish and move, if it does not persuade, men of all habits of thought; and, above all, the spectacle of a passionate tragedy of thought, the like of which the human race will probably never see again.



## VIII

### A PLEA FOR PSYCHOLOGY IN LITERARY CRITICISM

THERE have been so many different theories of art in the last hundred, and especially in the last ten years, that it is surely time we had a new, or at least a newly-presented, theory of criticism. At the present day criticism in its method—granted that its temper has changed, and for the better—is practically what it was one hundred years ago. Books of criticism, with the one or two exceptions which prove the rule, are to-day of two kinds: volumes of amiable gossip about writers, full of comparisons, quotations, anecdotes and great names, and volumes of professional analysis. An atmosphere more dismally post-mortem it would be impossible to imagine. In every case both the subject and the critic are dead. But every movement in imaginative art in the last century was, at least in intention, towards life; a greater faithfulness to reality was the object alike of the romantics, the realists, and the symbolists. Criticism alone remained apart from

this general movement. It accepted the one school after the other, and, while itself worlds away from reality, condemned with a good conscience any imaginative writer who dared to be in the same case. Criticism apparently expected everything to express life—except criticism.

The only way in which this can be remedied is by taking a leaf out of the book of art. Of all the new forms which were created in the nineteenth century, the most profound and the most interesting was certainly the psychological novel as it was handled by Stendhal and Dostoyevsky. This not only rediscovered the soul; it actually dared to say things about it; it presumed to approach the soul with the same unembarrassed curiosity with which other novels approached the humors and the passions. And in doing so it infused new life into the novel. Well, criticism can renew its life in the same way. If it be true that books are written by the mind and not by the appetites—perhaps too sweeping an assumption—the function of criticism is to treat, in their expression in literature, the mind and the soul. To discover the soul of a book, of a writer, of art itself; that is a task difficult and perilous enough to be interesting.

The prejudice against criticism and the common badness of criticism arise, in fact, from the same cause—the conception, the last which one

would expect to find among artists, that books are dead things, and that in considering them men are getting away from what is called "life." It is a vulgar prejudice. In reality it is held mainly by that trivial but influential entity, the general reader. The artist, no doubt, exploits it, but the true secret of his antipathy to the critic is not to be found there. He hates the critic not because the things which the critic examines are dead, but because they are alive. He is æsthetically an anti-vivisectionist. All this is natural—indeed, eminently natural. Nevertheless the fact remains that the subject-matter of all artists is life, and if an artist here and there (that exceptional kind of artist called a critic) chooses for treatment that expression of life which is art, the others can have only one reason for objecting—their naïve dislike of seeing their works vivisected. And, unfortunately, this objection has less validity just now than it ever had before—just now when art has become more and more realistic, and the novelist makes up a book just as he makes up a party, by inviting all his friends into it. The critic chooses at least, instead of his friends, the finest spirits of his time. If there were any life in criticism at all it would be bound to be more interesting than fiction.

One thing alone is needed, then, to raise criticism from its unnecessary disgrace: the recogni-

tion that literature is a living thing. Once this is granted, the position of the critic becomes just as important as that of the artist, for both are concerned with reality. In writing of Mr. Wells, for instance, the critic is dealing with life just in the same sense as Mr. Wells is dealing with life in writing of Mr. Polly. To the psychological critic a book is simply the starting-point for an inquiry into the human spirit. The division of literature into classes, poetry, fiction, criticism and so on, has only an apparent reality; in its essence literature is one and indivisible; it is attained when reality has been reached by the path of beauty. And criticism as a consummation of this can be just as noble as the epic or the drama. This needs to be said, and repeated again and again. Reality can be attained just as surely through criticism as through any other form of literature.

The method of a radical criticism must be psychological. What is it that the psychologist must look for in a work of art? In the first place, the man who expresses himself through it; not, be it observed the man *qua* man, citizen, father of a family, or social figure, but the man as he is, in the old religious phrase, "before God," the man in his relation to reality. This is not the whole of criticism, it is true, but it is the basis of it, for without knowing the spiritual entity which is a writer or an artist, how is it possible to judge him?

We are simply talking about printed paper. The reality which criticism pursues, however, is not quite the reality tracked with so much perseverance in modern novels. Criticism is not concerned with the commonplace relations, the appetites, trivialities, and meannesses of its subjects. These motifs are not only irrelevant—they are interdicted; and what the critic *must* be concerned with, for he has only it as subject-matter, is the mind and the soul, the attitude to reality, the relation to God.

This does not mean that he has anything to do with the "message" of his author; the orthodox prejudice of the critics against this was actually sound. An artist's "message" is generally nothing more than the organized ethical prejudices of an era; but his attitude is precisely what makes him an artist—in short, what gives him value. The one is ethical merely; the other is spiritual. Fortunately Ibsen's "Ghosts" was written, one might say, to illustrate this distinction. The purpose of the play was perfectly obvious: to point out a danger of the "social evil." Yet after seeing it we do not think of the problem of transmitted disease. The question we ask ourselves is not, "Why was not Alving more careful or institutions more reasonable?" but "Why is life of this nature at all, so terrible, so questionable?" The former is the question which Ibsen the mis-

sionary wished to ask; the latter is that which Ibsen the artist really did ask. And it is the question which the critic will seize upon; and by investigating it he should be able to discover what was Ibsen's attitude, Ibsen's relation to reality. For the treatment of problems of the spirit such as these, however, qualities the most subtle, the most daring, the most spiritual are required. Not even psychology is enough; or rather, an added psychology is needed, a psychology which can fathom the soul of art as well as the soul of man.

What is the method of this psychology? It is not mysterious; it is the method, on the contrary, which has been used by the greatest critics of all ages. The truths to be discovered, what in a writer is unique (the psychology of man) and what in a writer is universal (the psychology of art), are to be found in the immemorial paths of criticism, in such things as style, subject-matter, conception. True criticism is distinguished from false by this, that while the latter studies these things as ends, talking of style, for instance, as something disembodied, the former sees them in living relation. To the one, the style is good or bad, the treatment true or not true to life; to the other, style and treatment are in addition symbols, or, more exactly, symptoms. This method is very fruitful. We learn much about Mr. Hardy, for instance, when we discover on analyzing his



characters that they are without will and that for their author the dynamic principle exists in the outer world only. An analysis of "Ghosts" would be just as illuminating; it would reveal within Ibsen an optimistic reformer confronted continually by a tragic poet. And for this task of illumination, the works of a writer are all that is required; anything outside them, indeed, is irrelevant; for criticism is concerned with the mind and not with the man. To the critic the names of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Conrad should call up not the image of two men with differently shaped beards, but two differentiated minds, two unique intellectual forces—that and nothing more. Criticism should reject the vulgar and irrelevant personal detail, and find its inspiration in the interaction and collision of minds, in the cold and passionate ardor of the activities of the spirit.

Sainte-Beuve, that consummate master of the wrong kind of criticism, did not use this method. His habit was to show not the mind, but the man, "wart and all." This, however, is biography, and it is the critic's duty precisely to omit the wart. The signal fault of Sainte-Beuve's method is perfectly obvious. In presenting in his literary portraits the man himself along with his work, the work was made to appear less interesting, less important than the man. Literature thus appeared, even in literary criticism, in a secondary rôle; it



was subordinated to the delineation of character. And that Sainte-Beuve's *métier*, indeed, was not pure criticism, was demonstrated later on when Taine, starting with his theories, transformed his criticism into a mixture of history and sociology. Criticism can only become a thing unique and fruitful, however, by becoming something else than history or sociology, by treating literature purely as the emanation of spiritual entities, and by analyzing, or rather divining, the essence of these entities. A living conception of literature will be recaptured in this way.

There remains the question of the "absolute" value of art, the value of art as a thing finished and existing by its own beauty. The psychological method does not ignore it. The true critic is like Emerson's Plato; he bows down in entire reverence before Beauty when he sees it, but then he rises up again and says, "And yet things are knowable!" After all, those who prostrate themselves *ignorantly* before Beauty must be called her slaves, for even worship demands as its foundation a little knowledge. Beauty, it is certain, is the final criterion of art. Well, psychological criticism will tell us whether the beauty in any case is true or false beauty. The critic has three functions: to feel beauty when he sees it, and for that he must be an artist; to examine and find whether it is the true beauty, and for that he

must be a psychologist; and to discover what significance it holds, and for that he must be twice a psychologist—in other words, a philosopher. This does not mean of course that he is greater than the artists, the psychologists and the philosophers. An individual critic may be less than any one of them; yet he must be all three, or he is not a critic.

## IX

### NORTH AND SOUTH—I

THE thing which distinguishes the literature of Northern Europe from that of the South is so subtle, and is the summation of so many differences spiritual and physical, that never perhaps will there exist a poet or a critic so fortunate as to grasp it in its entirety. But there is one aspect of it which allows us to guess at least where the mystery lies, and makes us aware how deep is the division and attraction between these two worlds. Since the rebirth of culture during the Renaissance there has always been in Northern Europe a poignant longing for the South as for a home from which men were exiled and to which they could never return. It was felt as a sense of mystery and of loss as strong as that which religious men feel when they dream of a lost Paradise, as hopeless as that which poets cherish for their vanished childhood. The supreme expression in poetry of this vast regret is Mignon's song in "Wilhelm Meister," "Kennst du das Land"; and Heine in his lyric, "Ein Fichtenbaum Steht Einsam," knew that in writing about it enigmatically,

in mere hints, he would be understood by Northern people; so universal and so inescapable was this emotion. This thing, expressed directly in so many of the lyrics of Germany and of England, is concealed and tentative in almost all their greatest literature.

The love which German and English poets have had for classical themes is a love unconsciously uttered for the life and the horizons of the South. It began with the dawn of English literature: Chaucer had it, and it has not failed to our own day. With Germans, the most "Northern" people in Europe, a people Northern almost on principle, the life of the South, the life of Greece and Italy, has been an obsession. Lessing, Schiller and Goethe had a love for it which to us to-day seems pedantic. The less robust genius of Hölderlin was too profoundly steeped in it, was sunk so deep that it arose again little more than a poignant echo. The stillness of Venice lay so permanently round Platen, that Goethe declared of him at last that he did not love. Heine's delight in the South we know from his "Reisebilder"; and Nietzsche's preoccupation with Greece, France, and Italy was so exclusive that when he wrote of Germany he gave it to be understood that this was an irrelevancy. Hugo von Hofmannsthal to-day is as occupied with classical life as Goethe was in his time. In

Norway Ibsen, born one would have thought too securely in the North to return to the sunshine, obeyed the same necessity in writing his "Emperor and Galilean"; and the failure of that work was the measure of his failure to return. Yet with what passion, with a passion not to be found in his social dramas, he wrote of his love for Rome. Complaining to Brandes that it had been given over to the politicians he exclaimed: "Where shall we take refuge now? All that is delightful—the unconsciousness, the dirt—will disappear; for every statesman that makes an appearance there an artist will be ruined." With the South modernized, Northernized, there was nowhere to go.

The North dreams eternally of the South; but the South, lying in its life, ripened and sufficient, does not dream of the North, does not dream at all. It is within itself and finished; and it is this completeness, this form, for which the North longs. The South is in European literature the analogue of Aristotle's God; the principle, itself motionless, which draws everything to it and arouses aspiration and effort. The South has indeed woven into its immemorial and deeply grounded pattern whatever is new in the art of Northern Europe; and in the last century, in France and Italy, it became romantic. But its spirit did not go out from it towards the North;

it remained in its ring of wisdom and completeness. In all the romanticism of the French, in Gautier, in de Musset, even in Hugo, a true child of the North feels a touch of superiority, the superiority of a race which is by conviction, nay, by knowledge, classical, and whose main preoccupation with romanticism was the rendering of it in a more beautiful, a more classical manner than it had ever been rendered before. Their instinct was not so much to express the romantic spirit as to discipline it, and to give it form. They did not add anything to it, did not work creatively with and through it as the German and English romantic poets did; they enjoyed and put their seal upon it. It was to them, as it was not to the Northern poets, more or less subject-matter. They took what the Northern poets gave them, but they did not try to create in the Northern spirit, they did not once aspire to go beyond themselves.

With the Southern nations form is a possession; and form is satisfying, and is satisfying because it is the sign of a life complete and finished. With the nations of the North form is an aspiration, sometimes realized, but realized only by extraordinary concentration, by a concentration which carried their poets over what seem to be impossible obstacles. In the South one attains form by going with the tide of tradition, the

spiritual current of centuries; in the North one attains it by struggling deliberately against this immense force. By no one, perhaps, is form to be conquered without tremendous, almost crushing, labor; but the Southern races have a greater tact, a greater natural willingness, in undertaking the toil of art, than the Northern, who rebel against it even while they bow their necks under it. Nevertheless what they long for is this perfection of form, or rather this temper which makes perfection of form possible and even natural.

The difference in temper between the two literatures of Europe can be best recognized, it seems to me, in their conceptions of fate; for there is an indis severable connection between fate and form. In every work where the atmosphere of fate is strong the form is severe. Form is attained when a theme is treated with a sort of final economy and inevitability, and as if fate had put its palm upon it: it is the necessary, the pre-ordained, the indisputable, the final. But it is above all, like fate, the final, for the last attribute which we demand of a work of art is that it could be in no respect other than it is, that nothing could be added to or taken from it, that it should have the inevitability of natural things and a shape as inseparable from its nature as theirs.

In essaying to set in distinction the Northern and the Southern conceptions of fate, I have



thought it best to inquire not of the greatest writers in whom the qualities of humanity rather than of their race are incarnated, but of those writers who are great, but in a secondary degree, whose qualities every one would agree were pre-eminently Northern or Southern. The French writer who last century had the most conscious and most closely held apprehension of fate was Stendhal: the Northern writer who was most occupied with it was Ibsen. The astonishing difference in temper, indeed in fibre, between these two writers, is a measure perhaps a little excessive of the gulf which separates the North from the South; for it is almost impossible to be fair to the one without finding the other ridiculous, or to have a taste for both. Fate as it appeared to them was less the different sides of the same thing than two different things. Stendhal found it in such incidents as that where the Countess Pietranera, when asked by Count Mosca to marry the old Duke Sansaverino, the more securely to become his mistress, replies naïvely, "But do you not know that that is a great sin?" and immediately decides to do it; or where Fabrice, exiled from Parma, and threatened with lifelong captivity, returns to it in disguise again and again, driven by nothing—by mere whim; or in the fatalism of his grief when he is rescued from his prison and can no longer see his gaoler's daughter for

five minutes every day; or indeed in any episode in "La Chartreuse de Parme" or "Le Rouge et le Noir." Everything in these books is so unaffected, so simple, and yet moved from abysses so profound, that every action seems to be at once spontaneous and inevitable, and to have an immemorially old wisdom of life in it. The men and women love, intrigue, and act with the naturalness and beauty of forces of nature, and yet out of a wisdom, an ancient human sophistication, which seems the only thing that is less old than nature. Everything is so essential, so natural, and yet so full of art, so packed with finesse, the subtle finesse of intellectual animals or of children, that fate is concealed in the performance of it. The artificial and the natural are in these men and women so ingrafted that they can no longer be separated, or distinguished from one another. The artificial is the natural, or rather, they have become confused in the wisdom of centuries of life. Fate is everywhere; all these people possess it without reflection, and have not therefore painfully to discover it, would consider it stupid indeed to think about it. They know the value of the conscience-searching taken so seriously in the North; and they indulge it; but they do not imagine that any great alteration is to be effected by it in their nature, or that any act of emancipation in the Northern sense is possible for them. It is

the sign of their inherited emancipation not to be deceived by the hope of emancipation; and fate, therefore, while it is in Stendhal's books the main agent of beauty, has nothing metaphysical in it, and is not the outward form of some great moral process. Here, simply because a particular wisdom of life is complete, everything is seen as finished and as destiny. Stendhal describes the most generous and the most mean action with equal lack of affectation, and quite as a matter of course. There is no reprobation of vice, no astonishment at virtue; for both are accepted as aspects of the thing, good and evil, which is life.

This is the conception of fate, at once realistic and beautiful, which Stendhal held, and which has been, it seems to me, the Southern conception from the rise of Greek literature to the present day. It is not merely a tradition, but a whole life, a whole art of life; and it is itself predetermined: it can not be learned, for in every poet born in the South and with his roots there it has been already learned generations ago, and grows up in and along with him, and is at once his growth and the condition of it. Ibsen tried to pierce to the heart of this life in the work which he regarded as his greatest achievement, "Emperor and Galilean." One can feel certainly in every scene in this play the aspiration after Southern clarity, Southern security and certainty; but all is so con-

fused, so ineffectual and sentimental, that the only thing that comes clearly through is that North is North and South is South, and that in the Third Empire every latitude is deranged. Ibsen seemed in his "world-drama" to hold at once two opposite conceptions of the world.

"What is the way out to the light?"

"The way of freedom."

"What is the way of freedom?"

"The way of necessity."

The Southern conception of fate as necessity, as that which is and must be eternally, as the everlasting æsthetic aspect of existence, was confronted with the Northern conception of fate as freedom, as emancipation; and out of these two riddles a third was evoked which, seeing that it was not even a riddle, Ibsen struggled in vain to solve. His other dramas show us in which conception of fate he really believed. In all of them the problem is to discover the thing which must be done if men are to be free. His characters do not know instinctively, as those of Stendhal do, what is possible, what is for them right and inevitable. They do not know, indeed, how to behave in a way that is appropriate to them; and this problem, how to act appropriately, in harmony with their nature, out of necessity and truth, is for them the problem of fate. In all

Stendhal's characters the fate is already there; in those of Ibsen it is something to be discovered.

It is something to be discovered; but that is as much as to say that infinite hopes, cosmic aspirations, are centred upon it. There is, in all Ibsen's "emancipated" heroes, the expectation that when they do attain a realization of fate they will attain it in some new dimension; and this expectation gives a certain grandeur, a certain æsthetic justification, to their meanest struggles. Fate is spiritualized in them, and they expect in discovering it something more than the necessity to adapt themselves, some unshakable satisfaction, some freedom which shall be part of the freedom in which all things are comprised. In realizing fate they hope to realize life itself, and in a way in which it has not been realized before. The wisdom of the South is the wisdom of adaptation, for in all terrestrial life the complete is the completely adapted. But the North demands eternally something to be attained, and therefore imperfection and the hope of perfection at the same time; and only acknowledges those limits which can be overcome and in being overcome lead to that enigmatical psychological state which Nietzsche, a Northman if ever there was one, was always signaling as a "new freedom." It would be idle here to set up values, as that genius for generalization, Oswald Spengler, has done, or

even if the values are there, to apply them. It may be that the attitude of the North appears more rich potentially, more capable of advance and discovery; but the question of the value of these discoveries can never be solved, or whether if they are real they have more worth than the static completeness of the South. The South, it is certain, regards them ironically; but this, again, is as little as the credulity of the North a criterion, but, like it, merely a response. One can say that the North has a sense of the inexhaustibility of life and the South a knowledge of its eternal limitation, its everlasting return to the same manifestations, the same accidents; and both these attitudes have produced great art, great religion and great men in every department of human activity, and as far as we know can continue to do so. The North is centrifugal; the South is centripetal. The *Weltanschauung* of the Germans and the busy world-empire of the English (a substitute for *Weltanschauung* which apparently absolves them from having one) are manifestations of the Northern spirit. They are so foreign to the habitude of life of Italy, that they do not even arouse envy; and France, except for the few years that Napoleon overruled her, never sought for empire over the earth but only for as much ascendancy over her neighbors as would ensure her safety in her own eyes. In

her life the birth rate itself is an expression of the Southern temper, conforming to the spirit of a culture that is interiorly complete and desires to live within itself. But this existence is not less rich than that of the conquering North, but perhaps richer inasmuch as it has lost that tension of conscious effort which makes life in the North too much a struggle and too much therefore a matter of necessity.

So the two nations of Europe lie side by side, the North and the South, with England, which is both and which is neither, lying anchored a little away from them, and Russia, a whole foreign existence, discussing them in the East and passing judgment in a strange tongue.



## IX (CONTINUED)

### NORTH AND SOUTH—2

THE preoccupation of English poets with the South has never been so intense, so devouring, as that of the Germans; it has been at once less solemn and less passionate. If one could express the difference in a formula one might say that Germany longs for the South as for a home and England desires it as a land of delight. There is not in English literature, or only rarely, that *Sehnsucht*, that hopeless yearning for the South which is one of the moods of German poetry. To the English the South is not a need, but a paradise in which they are licensed to wander; and it is not the paradise from which they came, but a foreign one which has the seduction not of intimacy but of strangeness. They do not wish, like the Germans, to become Southern, to live the interdicted life of the South. They enjoy it, they are astonished and enraptured with it; and this is all they desire. They do not imitate it; and their literature is not essentially conditioned by their love of Greece and Italy. They take the South in the same spirit as the French a century ago took the

North; as a whole strange life which they wish to weave into their own, and thus enrich both; and not caring to become Southern they have not attempted, except in one or two *tours de force* like Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" and Arnold's lifeless "Merope," to be classical in treatment even when they were dealing with a classical theme. To Chaucer, Shakespeare and Keats the South was an anthology of beautiful legends; to Milton, a mine of similes with which he inlaid that Græco-Italian mosaic, "Paradise Lost"; to Arnold, a spirit, or at least a temper; to Browning, a mound of buried treasure from which he dug up rough-hewn "studies." They did not try to depict Greeks, Romans and Italians as the Germans did; and the whole difference in life between the peoples of the South and the North did not occupy or trouble them. The Greek of the antique world and the Italian of their own were both near and more alien to them than to the Germans. They regarded the Southern races without feeling for them any kinship except that of humanity; whereas the German poets felt that the South was itself humanity, and they experienced an emotion when they contemplated it as if they were themselves inhumane. They felt tied to it by blood and divided from it by something as strong as life. But the English looked at this existence with curious but careless eyes, like children re-

garding some new object, not comprehending it, but charmed with its novelty and strangeness. Not one of them meditated passionately on the difference between the Northern and the Southern spirit, as Winckelman, Goethe and Nietzsche did; for they never experienced the longing which gave reality in Germany to that meditation. The seduction of the South for the English was purely in its beauty, a seduction which was felt before the Renaissance, and is immemorial. It has never been more poignantly expressed than in the old Scots ballad, "The Demon Lover," in which the demon, counting the pleasures he intended for his bride, said:

I'll show where the white lilies grow  
On the banks o' Italie.

The English tradition of Italy as a land of magic and strangeness is in these lines; and Italy has since remained this land of irresponsible, almost unreal, beauty; and not, as it has been to the poets of Germany, a home from which they were banished, a real world of baffling life, a problem and a torment.

The English have felt no kinship with the South, and no *Sehnsucht*, no regret at the absence of kinship; and this is a sign at once of England's limitation and her completeness, a completeness as final in its style as that of France and Italy.

Like them she has become ripe and without desire except for her own life. She is insular, and so would France and Italy have been had they been islands. But her completeness is different from theirs; she has ripened under a different sun and her fruits are harder and less rounded. She has not the ripeness of a whole existence, of passion, sentiment, taste and intelligence all together, but peculiarly of practical life, of conduct. Her completeness is not æsthetic, a matter of form and style, but utilitarian, a matter of content. In English literature there is a picture of human life as realistic as in the literatures of France and Italy; there is an eye as unswerving for men's imperfections and immemorial sins, and for what is possible and impossible in human existence. Fielding was the equal of the French in temper, in balance and in knowledge. He saw, as they did, by a sort of second nature, that men desire virtue and sin against it, that they long for the impossible and are disillusioned if they do not attain it, that they lust and satisfy their lusts while maintaining the inviolability of virtue, and that in both cases they obey a universal necessity; and this knowledge was in him perfectly natural, without passion, and without pose. He knew that some men are foolish, some generous, some mean, and that they behave according to their nature; nevertheless he could not restrain a touch of ran-

cor against his evil characters, could not see them, as a French writer would have done, with pure æsthetic interest, and impartially. The English preoccupation with the practically desirable betrays itself in that extra ounce of morality, which mars, or at any rate characterizes, almost all English imaginative literature outside Shakespeare. It sets a limit to the variety of types which can be portrayed æsthetically; that is, without reprobation, and in a mood of pure contemplation. Interdicted by this moral temper the impartial portrayal of vice, the English have excelled every other people in the portrayal of foible, foible being that irregularity of the passions which harms no one and is consonant with the rule that everybody must act usefully. So strong is the English moral sense that a "character" has come to mean in English some one who indulges his desires harmlessly and quaintly. The great destructive passions in which the French and the Italians find a perpetual satisfying spectacle are not depicted in English literature, except by Shakespeare, without some touch of misgiving. The English have a conviction that love should lead, even in fancy, to marriage; and they hold this not because they are sentimental, but because the ripeness of England consists in its ability to act usefully, in its capacity for practical life.

This turn of the English for practice is not confined to their practical affairs; it determines all their beliefs, and they are more practical in religion and philosophy, as well as in conduct, than other peoples. Religion and philosophy cease to interest them when they cease to be useful; and they regard not this world merely but the next with a utilitarian eye. Life is to them not only a thing which demands that men should learn adaptation, but also a thing which can be adapted; but there are limits to the adaptability of things, and a certain contrariety and wryness in them with which one must reckon. This quality in things is to be discovered not by speculation but by experimental action, and practice tells the English, in the teeth of logic, that life is neither limited as the Southern races say, nor illimitable, as the Northern think. The English hold that they have the power to adapt things to their ends, but that this power is not infinite; they believe and doubt at the same time; and are convicted a little of Free Will and a little of Determinism. When they are audacious, as they often are, and attempt things which seem impossible, it is not faith which inspires them but the resolve to "chance it," and the suspicion that chancing it may be in the case the best way of handling the situation. It is one of their means of remaining where they strive always to be, a little above the

situation, not in the realm of adaptation, not in that of freedom, but midway between the two.

But they can not always remain there; the unliability of things sometimes brings them down; and it is this quality in things which they call Fate. A man attempts something, believing it possible: he discovers it is impossible. Enterprises which should succeed go wrong, on account of this perversity in the nature of things. All's right with the world, but also the time is out of joint. Here, where their ability to direct things seems to be finally frustrated, the English have still one resource left: compromise. When Esmond can not have Beatrix he marries her mother, and convinces himself that after all he has had the better bargain. Harry Richmond, having failed with the brilliant Ottilia, settles down with his Janet, of whose charm neither he nor the reader seems to have any comprehension. Mr. Hardy's heroines end almost automatically by accepting the second-best. English fiction has made a fashion of this kind of compromise, naïvely moralized, and to foreign peoples incredibly sentimental. It is only in one or two novels written by women, in "Wuthering Heights" and "Villette," that the tragedy of passion, the unconditional, unthinking logic of love, is faced and given form. But elsewhere, in the novels written by men, the practical workability of existence



must be maintained, and if that can not be done in any other way it must be done in appearance, by the subterfuge of sentimentality.

But there is a better way of meeting necessity practically than this and that is with humor; for humor is as practical as well as an æsthetic virtue: a sort of compromise enjoying itself. For a sense of Fate one must go in English literature, outside Shakespeare, to Fielding, Sterne and Thackeray. In Fielding there is, more perfectly than in any other English writer, a sense of the imperfection of every pleasure, every effort, and yet of the dues of pleasure and effort, and in any case of the inexorability of both. He treated this theme humorously, and in this he was in the English tradition; for to the English, humor is the last expedient for dealing pragmatically with life, for seeing its mixed good and evil, possibility and impossibility, and for taking with a good heart one's way between them. "Vanity Fair" is the story of people who never get what they want, but something else; a novel without a plot which exhorts the reader to expect and to be surprised at nothing, and which at the same time (this is English) gives him no opportunity to question the necessity of practicing the useful virtues. To-morrow we die, certainly; but one must take the matter with practical philosophy, with humor; and therefore we must not eat, drink and be

merry, but live with an eye to virtue, as men have done, with no striking success it is true, since the beginning of the world, or at any rate of the English nation. In tragedy all question of action and inaction, of life and death, is in a sense transcended; and tragedy stands somehow beyond action. But humor is an expedient for maintaining our actual superiority over things even where we can not bend them to our use, and is of service not only to life but to conduct.

Mr. Hardy is almost the only English novelist who stands outside this attitude to Fate, and he does not stand securely outside it. He has merely emphasized the English conception of the toughness of things by adding to it a touch of saturnine humor; he has translated it into a perversity, a malice almost deliberate; and in doing so he has never attained that undivided, unswerving seriousness with which Southern writers treat calamity. A gloom so unremitting as his has in it a touch of perverseness, of foible, which is foreign to the pure, unpremeditated sincerity in which great tragedies are written. He, as much as any other English writer, is concerned with the practical workability of life; and Fate is to him, as it was to Fielding, that hardness in things which makes them unpliant to men's desires, except that he credits to things a spirit deliberately antagonistic, which makes them turn

against men and wound them out of some mysterious, deep-seated malice. This malice, indeed, obsesses him, and the tragedy of his characters does not come out of themselves, but out of it. Fate is not within men, as it is in the literature of the North; nor both within and outside, in nature, as it is in that of the South: it is external wholly, in the realm where men attempt to act, and where their actions are unavailing or disastrous.

Here it would be easy to set up standards and to show that in their treatment of the problem of Fate the English in reality ignore it, and in ignoring it ignore the question of the signification of life; the question treated in different ways by the Northern and Southern races of Europe. A German or a Frenchman might prove that this attitude is cowardly, shallow, or even in a deep sense frivolous; an Englishman might demonstrate that it is the fruit of a ripe, unconscious wisdom. But we do not know what it is, but only that it is; and by the nature of the problem that is all we can know. England stands outside the Northern and the Southern civilizations, indebted to both, but without any deep longing for either. It is the greatest triumph of the practical spirit which the modern world has seen, and to perceive its virtues and faults clearly, one must not go to

France or Germany, but to Russia, the most impractical of all European nations, and the one which like England is at once European and a little outside Europe.

## IX (CONTINUED)

### NORTH AND SOUTH—3

IT is perhaps unfair to define a people by what it has not done; but a preliminary unfairness is a method not unfruitful of approaching a subject; and it is true of Russia that she is a nation without a drama. Her history and her literature are full of great episodes; she has produced two organizers of the first rank, Peter the Great and Lenin; but she has never had the organic integrity which makes the history of Western nations, chaotic as it may be on close examination, continuous and unified. The organization imposed on Russia by Peter was external; the chaos remained, immemorial and unchangeable; and the order became merely a part of it, the most schematized and irrelevant part, put there, God knew how, or simply because a man of tremendous character had happened to exist. Peter, like Lenin, was Western in training and aspiration, more fanatically and naïvely Western than any one could be who was born in the West; and Merejkowsky has given us Russia's opinion of him: he chose Peter as his symbol of the Antichrist. The Russian

people did not coöperate with Peter in the establishment of his State; and they seem never to have had since any anxiety whether there was a State or not. Such a profound indifference as this to organization and law makes one wonder whether Russia has ever desired to be a nation at all, and whether the existence in her of a central authority is not pure chance, an irrelevancy to her—necessary and distasteful. The controversy which occupied so much of her time last century between the Westernizers and the apostles of "Holy Russia" was a controversy unconsciously about the State. The Western Russians such as Bielensky wished to make Russia into a nation like France or England; and it was against this that Dostoyevsky fought with such passion, in the name of some unity which seemed to him larger than the nation and more necessary than law. To become a citizen with public spirit and an eye on progress was to him a lively image of spiritual death, for it set up boundaries on every side, political, intellectual and spiritual. Western Europe believes that these limits are necessary, that existence is such that we must accept them; but to Russia they are evil and uninteresting and stupid beyond endurance. Russians either disbelieve in the necessity of these limits or think they are not worth reflecting about; to get satisfaction in speculation upon them is to be bour-

geois. If any of Mr. Wells' sociological heroes had been portrayed by a Russian novelist, they would as a matter of course have been portrayed as Philistines. Pushkin concerned himself, after his first liberalism, with poetry; Dostoyevsky, with religion; Tolstoy, with morality; and all three were averse to politics, to any necessity which denied the spontaneity of their spiritual life. This spontaneity was the thing for which they exchanged everything else; and those actions which were designed to bring about a certain end seemed to them ungenerous and evil. The man of action was to them the supreme representative of what is anti-human, anti-Russian, anti-Christian, and never great, whatever his apparent power might be, but of a lower, utilitarian and successful order. Tolstoy's portrait of Napoleon in "War and Peace" is the Russian conception of the man of action; the man always crippled in his emotions by the *arrière-pensée* of success, and never rising to contemplation, or aware of the greatness of the destinies which he directed. There must be no calculated action, no State, no necessity; but the spontaneous generosity of one's spirit. The occupation of Russian literature with this has given it a profundity in psychology which is unexampled; but it has interdicted that realm in which the literature of Western Europe is so rich, where the might of calculated wills



meet and do battle, or are brought to nothing by the necessity of things; and Russia, recognizing no necessity, has no drama.

For Pushkin's "Boris Godounov" is not a tragedy but a succession of great scenes; and the plays of Chekhov, able as they are, are not dramas in the Western sense. The strength of the Russian indifference to Fate, even as a conception, may be seen from this: that to write dramas Chekhov had to invent a whole new technique in which not the conflict between wills but their complete inability to impinge upon one another was made interesting. To give the chance happening, the casual, almost insignificant word a dramatic poignancy; to make the lack of organic unity the chief seduction of the play: that is what Chekhov succeeded in doing. His drama is so different from that of Western Europe that it needs a different technique of acting; and as in France and England the actors must aim at movement and intensity, so in Chekhov's plays they must attain a deliberate abnegation of intensity. The characters in Western drama move to an end, but in Chekhov's plays, they wait about, and the end comes, it is not achieved. These people behave so uselessly, so without plan and so much out of the emotion of the moment that they have not enough method even to bring a play to an end; and Chekhov, the chronicler, as he himself said of the Russian de-

cadence, differed from Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky only in the weaker vitality of the emotions he described. In Tolstoy, too, one gets as strongly as in Chekhov a sense of the disorganization of life: the sole difference is that action in his world is infinitely more overflowing, more passionate: it is not any more ordered than necessary. In a work as short as "The Cossacks" there is no centre of action; people walk in and out again; do this or that, almost impartially; and if they have the inevitability of life they have not that of art. Something is described, but nothing is organized; and the book is a chronicle rather than a novel. The characters have impulses and impulses solely; they enjoy these impulses and follow them with naïve naturalism. But in a story so short they have not space to bring the action to a point; they need more room and a longer time if they are to appear completely; and length is a necessary quality in a Russian novel. Yet even in the great novels the characters only show themselves, and nothing decisive is done; or, rather, it is done and again undone, and the story goes on with the unexpectedness of life. Matthew Arnold remarked of "Anna Karenina," that in an English or French novel the action would have ended where Anna and Vronsky ask pardon of the husband, and where Vronsky commits suicide. But no; Vronsky recovers from his revolver shot; Anna gets

better; her husband cracks his knuckles more maddeningly than ever; and the lovers carry on their affair where it left off. And this is because Anna's repentance was an impulse and her re-awakened passion for Vronsky an impulse; Vronsky's revolver shot an impulse and his desire to recover an impulse. Nothing was done out of a regard for duty, and it is not surprising that Arnold, who expected to find conduct in three-fourths of life, was puzzled. Yet in spite of their disregard for duty these people act with such a profound humanism that one is astonished at their goodness. They sin without pettiness, but also without that pose of greatness in sin which makes a little absurd the grand transgressor as conceived by the Latin peoples. They behave like angels even when they behave like fallen angels; for there is in their vice as little as in their virtue an eye on practical results. Duty in the Western sense is a great conception, and gives the life of the Western peoples a title to respect; but it has to pay for harnessing every good impulse to a useful end by suffering the evil impulses also to become effectual. Vice in the Western style is methodical vice, and is typified in Molière's Harpagon, in Richardson's Lovelace, in Valerie Marneffe, Emma Bovary and Becky Sharp, and in the minor villains introduced into English novels to awaken a detestation of sin. If one does not sin deliberately,

deriving some reward from it, in the eyes of the Western peoples one does not sin at all; and they regard the unprofitable transgressions of men as accidents demanding humor or pity. The methodical sinner one can find as seldom in Russian literature as the methodical man of virtue.

In Tolstoy there is this sense of the disorganization, the unpredictability of life; but in Dostoyevsky it becomes chaotic, and while in "War and Peace" we see impulses directing corporeal bodies, in "The Brothers Karamazov" we are aware only of the gigantic tempest of the impulses, and the people are in a different dimension where they move dimly. We do not see Dostoyevsky's characters; we feel them. We know them from inside, but we would not know them if we met them in the street, as we would know Anna or the most slightly etched figure in "War and Peace." To discover that they are really Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov or Ivan Karamazov, we must have Dostoyevsky beside us to point out their secrets and their complexes. They do not exist for us at all in repose, as the characters of Tolstoy and Balzac do, but only in action and violent action; and they have nothing static, nothing of the quality of pictures. We can imagine Crevel lying in bed, simply lying in bed; but we could only imagine Raskolnikov doing so if at the same time he had a fever or a nightmare.

It was the fever and the nightmare which were most interesting to Dostoyevsky, and not Raskolnikov. How many incredible impulses will come out of one man, like rabbits out of a conjurer's hat, given a certain situation, or given none at all: that question entranced him. His characters are accordingly always surprised, one suspects too continuously surprised, at the things they do. Nothing in them is typical, for every decision they make is an exception to a rule which they do not know. They act not only from impulse, but from an impulse always paradoxical. They are continuously supernatural or sub-natural, and there is scarcely an instance in their experience of a simple human emotion. Nothing in literature is farther away from the necessary and the typical. It is not merely that they are oblivious of the rule, as Tolstoy's characters are; they involuntarily violate it at every turn, out of an unconscious enmity to it which must be expressed. In this they are not so much human beings as the vehicles of Dostoyevsky's terrific sense of the duality of human life, a duality of which he saw only that it made every paradox possible, because one could not tell when one term would prevail over the other, or on how absurd an issue the victory might be gained, or, indeed, which side was which. Here the sense of Fate in the Western sense is almost entirely lost. Everything is possible, and espe-

cially the impossible, and that is all that can be said.

This people, in whom the sense of duality is so strong, whose portrayer is Tolstoy and whose pathologist is Dostoyevsky, has far less than others a single essence which can be grasped. Russia is sometimes both terms in her duality, sometimes one, sometimes neither; she is a Proteus which not only changes its shape every moment, but which seems to exist in different shapes at the same time. She has an attitude neither to herself nor to Europe, although Europe obsesses her. In Germany and the Northern countries the longing for the South is almost inescapable; in Italy and France the conviction that existence is an end and that it has been reached is settled for good; in England the sense of confidence and stability is so unalterable that only the destruction of England will break it. But one can not say what Russia is. She has not the Northern reverence for the established culture of the South; but that is not because she is content with herself. She has not the completeness of life which is the sign of a ripeness, but nevertheless there is no achievement in the world of fact which she longs either to understand or to imitate. She is the most quick of all nations in grasping foreign civilizations and cultures, and the most disdainful of these once she has grasped them. In



power and depth of intellect she is astonishing to slower peoples like the English, yet to her, literally and not in theory, the last is the first, and the muzhik more than the philosopher. There is no Fate binding her warring qualities together, yet her disorder gives one a sense of overflowing riches; and although her wealth has an appearance of waste, it does not seem to be altogether wasted. Success and failure are to her, in Nietzsche's phrase, responses; and she has never been able to decide which is to be preferred. This is because she lives more continuously and more spontaneously than any other people in the realm which one may call with equal inadequacy æsthetic or spiritual. She lives there as completely as beings can in a world of corporeal facts; and her life accordingly is far more rich than her achievement, just as the achievement of Western Europe is at present more rich than its life. For living as she does more than other nations in "the invisible world," where the spirit bloweth where it listeth, and the compulsion of Fate is not keenly felt, the gulf between the spiritual and the practical is wide, and the invisible life has a separate and unconditional existence of its own. Consequently the experiences of the spirit are in Russia felt more freshly and with more intensity than anywhere else in Europe. A Western European regarding this uniquely interesting life will be



forced to admit that failure, like everything else, has its compensation, and in an access of generosity may go the length of regretting the slow and magnificent success of Western Europe, piled up by the successive waves of century after century.

Yet all these feelings, of longing, of admiration, of regret, of sufficiency in races, are in a sense idle: they are responses. Nations remain what they are, and one can not by taking thought become French or Russian. It may be that Russia would be the better for acquiring a few English qualities, and that England would be improved if she were to Russianize; but it is certain that neither will do so. Nothing is more idle than to blame nations for their qualities, or to make any judgment between them. The formlessness of Russia can not be set as a defect against the form of the South, but only as a quality; for here we are not concerned with virtues and vices, but with virtues solely. These virtues build up nations and at the due time dissolve them again; and the centre of primacy in the world moves from one point to another in obedience to a law or a chance which is greater than any nation. It passed from Egypt, which is now only a myth and a wreck of statuary, to Greece, to Rome, to Western Europe; and it will pass inevitably from that to some other point, to Russia, to America, perhaps to China, on the day

when Russia, America or China will be more significant to men than Western Europe. The day of greatness, like that of death, comes as a thief in the night; and Western Europe will not go down in a visible apocalypse, but noiselessly and unperceived, when men's interest has been withdrawn from it and given to something else. But when that will be it is not for any one to guess. One thing, at any rate, is certain; that Western Europe is, like Egypt and Greece, eternal whether it passes away or remains; and the rise and fall of civilizations are not to be mourned with irrevocable sorrow by those who have learned the secret of making them immortal.

## X

### THE TRUTH ABOUT ART—I

WHAT if all the assumptions on which we have thus far judged art should be—erroneous? What if every system of æsthetics and every criticism should be, not merely wrong here and there, but by their very existence the standing, immemorial misunderstanding of art? In short, what if questions regarding the function and the “meaning” of art simply should not be asked at all, and, in any case, should never be answered? These inquiries have drawn forth and written this edifying essay.

My thesis is that art can be comprehended on one hypothesis only, that this hypothesis concerns the universe, and that, in the history of the universe, it has very seldom been consciously held. The hundred and one philosophers who have constructed theories of art have certainly not held it: their systems of æsthetics are to be found, each killed with an appropriate comment, in the terrifying appendix to Signor Croce’s book. Signor Croce made only one error in that almost infallible work; he should finally, as an exercise in im-

partiality, have sent his own theory to the guillotine, and have become his own executioner. But unfortunately he could not refute himself.

The hypothesis in question is one of two which men can make about existence; and both of them are fundamental; that is to say, one can build a complete structure upon them—over the abyss. The first, the most common, the most “philosophical,” affirms the Absolute; eternal reason and final prevision. In doing this, it impresses on all things the character of necessity and that of usefulness; for if existence is rational through and through, everything must have its use, and there can not be, in this efficient plan, anything that is superfluous—or free. There can not be play, riches, or delight. Necessity, whether it be philosophical or economic, is a form of poverty; and a final reason, postulating a universe working according to plan, makes all existence poor. It is, in fact, the conception of men who are poor themselves; of thinkers driven so hard by logic that they imagine, when the rules of their game constrain them, it is life itself constraining them; and of moralists so unresourceful that they must create around them on every side duties, duties, and for ever more duties. The Absolute is an attempt to give duties to everything: to geological strata, the jungle, the very stars. All these must work and do nothing else, for the sake of some-

thing or other, not themselves, making for logic or perhaps for perfection.

Now this is the conception which all theorists in æsthetics have held. Signor Croce himself, in spite of his marvelous intuition in art, remained faithful to it; and he only formulated his æsthetics as a part of his philosophy. He was not content to say that art is expression; he had to show what function art has in thought, and what function thought has in a universe in which he assumes everything has a function. In doing that he submitted art once more to the slavery from which he had freed it. His "Æsthetics," honest as it appears to be, with a sunny Italian honesty, is a dark hypocritical book, for in reading it one can not keep one's eye on art; one is continually giving an apprehensive glance towards the philosophical system in the background. The particular meanness of philosophy, the meanness of fitting everything into its place, where it has to sit still with folded arms eternally, lies like a damp shadow on that sunny, rarefied and emancipating book.

Everything has its place, all philosophers believe in their hearts; and they begin to construct their systems, and at last try to find what place art has in them. Schopenhauer justified art as a sort of holiday from the terrible urgency of the Will-to Live: Nietzsche praised it as "the great stimu-

lus to life"; and more mediocre and better-known philosophers have affirmed it because it makes morality "beautiful," or humanizes that wild animal, man, or even confirms his belief in eternal justice. Now the strange thing is that there is nothing in common between the effects of art upon us when we enjoy it, and those attributed to it by the philosophers. Art delights us precisely because it takes us out of the realm of duty, of reason, and of necessity. It does not moralize or humanize us, nor remind us of eternal justice; it carries us into a world which is neither necessary nor necessitated, but perfectly arbitrary and free; and gives us freely something inconceivably rich and magical, not because we deserve it, nor even because we "need" it, but simply as a final golden superfluous drop to our filled cup. Delight is the feeling which we experience when we receive something great or beautiful without needing it. And art gives us this feeling. Now why, if, as the philosophers claim, its function is to moralize us?

The plainest truth about art is that it is superfluous, and springs out of superfluity: to give it a use one has to strain and falsify not only art but the terms one uses. Another hypothesis altogether is needed, and that hypothesis is one in which excess and superfluity are conceivable. In the end, the presence in the universe of superfluity

is only made possible by setting at the ultimate bounds of existence chance, irrationality, folly. Then all things become, as they are, possible. Then freedom is gained perhaps for the first time. This choice, once it is made, commits us to several assumptions. For instance, that there is no connection whatever between a thing's necessity—to the "world" or to anything else—and its right to exist. Everything exists as a perfectly unnecessary thing: we ourselves, philosophies, literatures and States as well as butterflies and planets: it is only after they have come into existence that we make them into necessities. We are not entitled to condemn anything because it has no function; on the contrary, to be without a function is to be free, to be rich. The greatest things have been done by men who have had no function: for to do a thing freely is to be great. Nations do not attain power by answering continually the treadmill problems set to them by circumstances, but by doing something else which is not needed, and thus in escaping from necessity. The principle of progress is the principle of superfluity, of spendthrift and immoral inventiveness and abundance. The unnecessary and the inconceivable have been greater friends to man than the necessary and the reasonable. This enigmatical character of art, this ultimate impossibility of making it turn any moral mill, has been noted oc-



casionaly in the last two centuries: by Blake, in his affirmation of imagination against reason, an affirmation which it will take centuries and centuries of play to understand; by the advocates of "*l'art pour l'art*," whose only fault was that, while their theory was true of art, they were not talking of art, but of their own works; by Nietzsche when he forgot his philosophy and spoke as a psychologist and a poet; and by Mr. Clive Bell in his vain and pasty book on art containing as its one gem the theory of "significant form." The germ of this theory was in Pater's remark that all art aspires to the condition of music; but Mr. Bell, in claiming audaciously that all that we acknowledge in literature as pure art is one or two lyrics in which the sense is dissolved and lost in form and sound, became for a moment, perhaps out of perversity, profound. He was right. All that men in their hearts finally call art is pure music, pure fantasy. Except intellectually, the greatest thing is to men the most enigmatical thing; that which is meaning and yet has no meaning; what is called magic. The aspiration of art is towards absolute meaninglessness: all the rest is solemn unreality. We comprehend the theme of a long poem only—why should we strive to conceal it?—by an effort of our conscience, as a matter of duty, that is, by inducing in ourselves a mood hostile to the mood

of art. It is only the occasional line which we enjoy spontaneously, without effort, in a sort of irrational delight. The whole scheme of Milton's "Paradise Lost," illuminated so brilliantly recently by Mr. Denis Laurat in his "La Pensée de Milton," is, as art, mere lumber, mere gaucherie, however profound it may be intellectually. We do not acknowledge it as art, except by the hypocritical intellect; but do acknowledge as art

the spirits elect

Bind their resplendent locks inwreathed with beams  
Now in loose garlands thick thrown off; the bright  
Pavement, that like a sea of jasper shone,  
Impurpled with celestial roses smiled—

or

Ah, sunflower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the sun;  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
Where the traveller's journey is done—

or

*quand devant notre porte  
Les grande pays muets longuement s'étendront.*

or

It neither grew in syke nor ditch  
Nor yet in any sheugh;  
But at the gates o' Paradise  
That birk grew fair eneugh.

Now we do not seek to read meaning into these: it is what is beyond meaning in them that gives us an irrational delight. The only mistake which Mr. Bell made, indeed, was that he retained "significant form" after he had invented it. As a war cry this was for a time sufficient, but as a formula it has been bad for artists. For art does not strive for "significant form," but for a form into which we do not wish to read any significance at all. It seeks to become absolutely unnecessary, absolutely delightful: something beyond what is needed by man or God.

The function of criticism, taken so seriously by Arnold half a century ago, and taken so solemnly ever since, is not a great matter: it is to be the fly on the wheel. The question of criticism is really this: Do literary judgments serve any end? Signor Croce demonstrated that you can not judge a work of art. Every work must be judged singly and by itself, he said; and that, of course, meant that it could not be judged at all. The question is whether it need be judged. We *must* have moral judgments, for morality is a matter of conduct, and conduct is a matter of practice, and if in practice we do not succeed in the affair of living, we must die. There must be a recognizable likeness in the actions of people who live in the same continent, or in the same world; they must know where they are: it is literally a matter

of life and death to them that they should know where they are. Here we are in the realm of necessity; and valuations have a meaning. But in the realm of the unnecessary, the superfluous, the free—and only what is superfluous is free—values have no longer any meaning. Where there is no need to value it is stupid to value. It is, indeed, a misunderstanding; and criticism has been thus far wrong, not merely here and there, as when Jeffrey made the terrible *faux pas* about Keats; it has been itself the grand, standing misunderstanding of art. It has assumed that works of art must be valued; but they neither must nor can. It has destroyed the proper attitude to art.

Why men should have begun to “value” art at all is a different question; probably they did it out of habit. The process of evaluation has had the same history as almost every other human thing: it began as a necessity, it became a task, and it has become a habit. In the beginning man created values that he might survive; then he valued for the sake of certain things: in Attica for the sake of life, in Judea for the sake of eternal life, at the Renaissance for the domination of the world, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the mastery of society; but even while the great values lived there were men who

valued for the sake of valuing. Socrates, that enigmatical and too rational genius, was perhaps among these, along with nine-tenths of the Fathers of the Church, the "scientific" historians against whom Nietzsche made a perfectly uncomprehended point, and the whole band of critics, except Lessing and Goethe, who were discoverers and not judges. All criticism is criticism for criticism's sake. It is a moral habit carried over into art. The proof of its falsity, its histrionism, is that, in spite of incredible industry and even stupidity, it has not been able to establish an æsthetic convention which mankind, or even all the people in one nation, or even the small public in one nation who are interested in art, will accept. If the moral convention had fared as badly as this we should all long ago have been back among the animals. But then the moral convention is necessary to action, while the æsthetic convention is not necessary to art.

From all this it follows—that criticism should be abolished? On the contrary. It has the same right to exist as every other superfluous thing. Its justification is that it fulfills no use; that it is, like art, expression. But if a thing is not useful it can not be important? This is the great orthodox heresy about the universe which makes it such a dull place to live in. The superfluous

things are the important things, the justification of life, the saving grace whereby the useful and the necessary are redeemed. For life also is finally expression, and not task nor instrument.

## X (CONTINUED)

### THE TRUTH ABOUT ART—2

POSTULATING this conception of art and the universe, and granting the absence of necessity in them both, what—without moral *double entente*—are we to call art? We have abolished criticism: that is, we have abolished it in ourselves. We seek in art for no meaning and for no use. We enjoy it for the first time without an *arrière-pensée*, allowing ourselves a smile at the insidious gravity of Saint-Beuve, and his scruples about being moved by a work of art without knowing (by recollection?) whether he was right in being moved by it. To us this seems only to be the critic's peculiar, crabbed way of enjoying a work in retrospect, a rolling of it on his standardizing tongue; perhaps a method of digestion for one with a deranged stomach; at any rate, an expedient of a dulled sluggish spirit, not ready and capable enough to seize immediately and to appropriate at once with every faculty and every sense all the nuances of an experience. The full force of the shock of art must be broken, must evaporate insensibly in the memory, before it can



be assimilated with the too conscientious cells. Perhaps a little pedantry, a little "justification" is added in this interesting process. The critic is a man who can not digest anything unless he has proved to himself he should digest it. This process of digestion he calls in retrospect valuation.

But, disembarassing ourselves of this problem—which is interesting, after all, only psychologically, and that because all problems are interesting psychologically—what is the omnipotent seduction of art, and why should we enjoy it at all? I am not on the point of formulating a theory of æsthetics. On the contrary, I do not imagine that it is necessary to find an answer to this question at all. It is interesting chiefly because in answering it one answers other questions, moral questions, which should be answered because they stand to-day like a row of gloomy cliffs casting a damp shadow on all paths. Only what is gloomy should be refuted. But, to come back to the point, why do we find pleasure in works of art? Because in them existence is made to appear as *play*. The "heightening" of lights, colors and sounds in art is brought about simply by the switching of existence on to the plane of play and freedom. In art we enjoy the whole universe, we enjoy even ourselves as spectacle, as play. The condition of entering this world is that we should leave every necessity and every duty be-

hind us. Here morality, society, right and wrong, are merely the suitable or unsuitable background, the setting, the footlights, nothing more, and the good men and villains are "characters" simply, mere form and movement. We do not value them as we should value them in "real life"; that is our privilege. If we have not first and foremost a feeling for their form, for their mere movement and play, we have missed everything. As Nietzsche said: "A man is an artist to the extent to which he regards everything that inartistic people call 'form' as the actual substance, as the 'principal' thing."

Yes, "form," this glittering, seductive, and apparently void and empty thing, is nothing else than the new semblance of things when they are reborn as play, free and without task. To see the world *artistically*, one must unconsciously bereave it of function, so that all movement should be apprehended as mere movement. Where the bad man is deliberately conceived by the artist as bad, and the good man as good, there is unclean art, whatever the morality might be: all that this can produce are paragons of vice like Jonas Chuzzlewit, and bad monuments of virtue like Squire Allworthy. But take Heathcliff, that profound child and blackguard. He is entrancing in the free and yet inexorable movement of his evil; he is altogether art, altogether style: we are not con-

cerned with his content, for there is no content, there is only form. He has been purified from everything but his own shape and nature. We appreciate his qualities as we appreciate the qualities of a landscape, or some great phenomenon of nature, with equal enjoyment of what in another sphere is called good and bad. In all great, severe and immoral art this transformation takes place. It is not mere cognizance of evil which we experience here, it is enjoyment. We *enjoy* the devilry of Iago, the avarice of Harpagon, the egoism of Julien Sorel, the lasciviousness of old Karamazov, the icy disgust of Hedda Gabler, as we enjoy the gnarled humors of that stout old tree Dugald Dalgetty, or the suavity of Dr. Primrose. It was a complaint of the old critics—a complaint no longer to our taste—that Milton made his Satan far too attractive: but that was precisely a proof of the potency of his art. Milton was not, as Blake pretended, “on the devil’s side without knowing it”: he was neither on the side of the devil, nor on that of God. Both God and the devil were conceived by him on the plane of play: and his Satan was great because in delineating him he escaped from the bonds of his theory, in which Satan was a fate, into the realm of drama, of free play, in which Satan was a god.

But I am already beginning to be misunder-

stood. Art is play and conceives existence as play, but that is not to say with Schopenhauer that in art we escape for a time from the treadmill of the Will to Live. These are mere words: for the play of art, the escape from the wheel, that too is life, and even Will to Life. No, what Schopenhauer escaped from in his poignant, almost too poignant pleasure in art, was his own conception of life, a conception of life in which immorality—and therefore, to the discerning, morality—was too deeply, too inextricably, involved. In order to conceive the world as bad—and to do so may be a luxury of misanthropy—one has first to conceive it as good; and this is precisely what Schopenhauer did. Things have a purpose, he had come to believe, but they have in some inexplicable manner lost it. In other terms, there were two Schopenhauers, an artificial Schopenhauer, a sort of second nature, who had absorbed the moral assumptions of philosophy so fatally that he did not know he had absorbed them: and the natural Schopenhauer, the clear-eyed demon, who saw that existence was not as the philosopher tied to his flesh conceived it to be. The contradiction here was complete, and the issue from it was the most bizarre that has ever been achieved. The real Schopenhauer did not prevail over the artificial one: on the contrary, both stood their ground, and the result of

this simultaneous refusal to surrender, or even to compromise, was Schopenhauerian pessimism. For neither of the Schopenhauers was a pessimist: it takes two souls in one breast to make pessimism. To see in all existence design and providence, as one of these characters did, was certainly not to be a pessimist; but neither was it to see in existence no providence, no final purpose at all. In order to achieve pessimism one must first assume a purpose in the universe and then discover that it is not there. *Voilà* Schopenhauer. In spite of what he saw with his own eyes he continued to maintain that the universe was a system; and holding that, he had to hold also that it was a system which worked badly. Nietzsche was later to discover the true value of Schopenhauer's pessimism and how much it held as a disguised promise. For he asserted that existence was not a system at all, not even a system working badly, but play and exuberance. Schopenhauer was tormented by his Will to Life not because it produced suffering, but because it was contrary to reason, because it was senseless, and against his philosophic instincts. It became to Nietzsche the great æsthetic fact and the justification of life. This was a revolution the results of which we can not yet reckon up.

In this new world discovered lately by philosophy—and known all the time to art—expression,

play, form, style are synonomous terms, and they express all that is art. There is literally nothing else. Where there is "content" there is not yet play. In all great works, whether they are novels or symphonies, everything is style. If there is content—that is, anything which the thinker as thinker, or the practical man as practical man, can seize upon and discuss in his special terms, that has not been resolved into play, that is, in the slang of criticism, merely "interesting"—it is precisely not art. The tendency of modern literature has been, of course, to introduce, on one excuse or another, more and more content into art. There have been the propagandists of "modern ideas," the most honest subverters of art; there have been the realists, the most pure impurists one could imagine, with their claim that the novel must not merely be art, but science as well; the psychologists, who have added Freudianism to their gruesome charms, and the sociologists, a mere few, consisting chiefly of the group of personalities which we call Mr. H. G. Wells. These individuals—or coteries, one does not know which to call them—have not been of much importance as artists, but they have been influential as amateur theorists on æsthetics, and as publicists who have changed altogether the public taste. How quickly and radically that taste has been changed! Arnold, writing hardly



more than half a century ago, complained that Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" "was less a work of art than a piece of life." To say that about a novel to-day, of course, would not be to depreciate it, but to give it the highest praise within the resource of the critic. Yet remembering what had been done before it, one can not read "War and Peace," that tremendous and Olympian book, surely the greatest novel in every quality but one which has ever been written, without feeling that here we are too much on the level of the characters—perhaps actually within them—at any rate too troubled by their scruples, domesticities, sicknesses and sorrows. The calm of Tolstoy is not the calm of the artist, but that of a divinely strong, undaunted and unassailable demon, of an iconoclast so clear and so universal that he can break everything and not be broken himself. One page of Flaubert takes us into a different world; but Flaubert was an artist of such plenitude that even his theory of naturalism could not fatally dim the splendor of his achievement.

It is of course easiest to discern the spirit of play in the figures on a Greek vase or in a piece by Mozart. But how can tragedy, the highest expression of art, be construed as play? Tragedy can be understood as the form of æsthetic play corresponding to that which in the practical



world we call adventure. Both have been misunderstood, and even by those who have practiced them. The adventurer has been covered by a hundred disguises in the last hundred years; he has been compelled even to disguise himself. The ungovernable spirits who have periodically set out for the North Pole, as an escape from "civilization" and themselves, have incongruously been credited with a tender regard for science, a monster of even more than arctic coldness. Livingstone, the one man in the time of Victoria who contrived to be both Victorian and charming, Livingstone whom nobody could know and not love, who put his life in jeopardy every day almost, out of a sense of gallantry, and who could not keep away from Africa and danger, has been amiably vilified as a sort of superior Sunday-school teacher. Every explorer in the nineteenth century—and exploration in that period was the grand resource of the adventurous—has been reduced to a scientist, or a missionary, or a hero of trade. Here men refuse to see what is before their eyes; and their misunderstanding of the tragic artist, who is more difficult to discern, is infinitely worse. Take Dante. We have not enough courage to see that Dante needed hell as his particular arena, wild beasts, antique horrors and all. That old Roman of the Empire, with so much of Tiberius and Tiberius's love of grim

practical joking in him, put into its place by mediæval theology—and it was perhaps the great use of mediæval theology to Dante that it gave evil a place—found within the limit of his three metaphysical estates the whole realm of æsthetic adventure which he sought. He needed the cold spaces of his “Paradiso” after the heated horrors of the “Inferno” and the “Purgatorio”; but he also needed them all as the greatest adventure which could at that time be imagined. “La Divina Commedia”—in the mouth of Dante, that was as much as to say, “What an adventure!”

There remains as a theoretical obstacle lyrical poetry. We make a mistake if we imagine that it is real anguish or real love that conceives the poem. When one writes a love poem one is for the moment not in love. The case of Goethe is æsthetically notorious; his odes were generally the epitaphs of his amours. A quick-witted woman begins to imagine everything bad when her lover writes her sonnets; he is already too far from passion and from her. In poetry the terrible physiological seriousness of passion is lightened, and the utilitarian, racial necessity driving to the purpose of procreation, forgotten. All the “poetry” of love—that is nothing else than poetry. In love poetry the *raison d'être* of love is ignored; and the very means whereby life is made possible is conceived as mere “drama,”

as mere beauty and fantasy. Surely a feat more extraordinary has never been achieved.

But all this is already said in Nietzsche's aphorism: "Art is the metaphysical activity of man." Only—in that case, what is metaphysics?

## XI

### DE L'AMOUR

IT is one of those strange truisms which never occur to us, that men and women have thus far been defined by philosophers and gods who have regarded life as an imperfect system of ethics. I have dreamt of discovering what men and women must be if all existence is finally play, as one or two men are beginning to believe; and above all, what must be that point beyond man and woman, that extension of man and woman until their lines meet in infinity, which we call love. If the universe is not, as we have for æons held it to be, a rational and moral universe, but a universe beyond reason, morality, and everything that is useful and instrumental, then man and woman must be things quite other than we have always conceived them. We do not know them yet, perhaps! We do not know ourselves; we know only what we have made ourselves. Man—the reasonable animal; perhaps that is a great distortion; a deduction, not from the existence of man, but from the conception of the universe into which man has been fitted.

Love—understanding by the term that passion which gives birth to things either of corporeal or of intellectual reality—occupies a central position in the process of life. It is the everlasting beginning and new beginning and new spring of things, the principle whereby the whole world is made for ever young. In a universe built by an eternal reason, one would have expected that this activity, at any rate, would not be left to chance, that it would be the most solemn, the most certainly and irrefragably reasonable of all activities, the very rock of reason. Yet it is universally acknowledged as the most irrational thing. There is nothing less reasonable than love. Man in himself, we know, is not ineluctably reasonable: he is a rational creature chiefly because there are other men in the world; and one man is more irrational than two. But the masterpiece and acme of irrationality is a man and a woman together. Then irrationality becomes enfranchised; then it is natural and right to be irrational; of that even the wisest and strictest men of thought have no doubt. About every other escapade from reason they have a bad conscience, but about this none at all. There is a residuum of sense even in the jokes which men tell one another; in their most gross extravagances they have always a furtive eye on masculine rationality, a principle of respectability;

but with women they can escape from the bonds of reason altogether and become absolutely and without restraint nonsensical. For all perfect play a woman is needed. The play of man is irretrievably serious; it always becomes a "game," and a game must have rules. But in the game between men and women there are no rules; or rather there are rules, but part of the game, the interesting part, is the breaking of them. This game is played round the very act, and in the very act, in which life is procreated.

But there are things which can not be said in a vocabulary which has been so fatally modified as ours by the feminist movement. How is it possible to affirm without being misunderstood that the fundamental relation of man to woman, whether they love or are loved or not, is that of play? How is it possible to assert without involving oneself in endless complications, that the world in which men by themselves and women by themselves exist is a world of labor and duty, but that the world in which they move together is a world of play? Only by naming a few psychological or perhaps physiological facts which dive somewhat beneath the usual feminist theories. As, for example, that women exhilarate men even when they neither love nor are loved by them. Every one must have felt, without psychologizing it, the immediate increase of exu-

berance and delight which one receives when one moves into a room where women and men are talking or dancing together. The atmosphere is immediately quickened and rarefied; (Stendhal has better than any one else rendered this atmosphere); the most dull and solid facts at once, and without effort, become "unreal"; words no longer have their ordinary meaning, one uses them consciously and lightly, without their content, and merely as pleasant fictions; one does not reflect whether what one is saying is "true" (that is at the moment the most trifling matter); one is no longer concerned with the usefulness, expedience, or even possibility of things; and in all this there is the sense of a delightfully dangerous dance over a tight-rope uncompromisingly stretched to the breaking-point. One exists no longer in a world where the useful and the necessary are recognized, but in one of pure unreality, of pure play. This is the realm, which the philosophers have sought for so long, in which two and two make anything else than four. But let the company separate into mere men and mere women, and immediately all the useful virtues, reason, common sense, forethought, sanity, flock back to them and settle in the lines on their faces. One jokes still, but one does it sensibly. Life becomes once more rational: the men have only to be left together to be reminded, by the



suggestion of one on the other, that they have tasks and problems. Casanova avoided for two decades that moment; the seduction which the atmosphere of butterfly carelessness had for him was so unconditional, so fatal, that he could not do without it; he desired to live in it always as the most beautiful and ecstatic mode of existence.

But when one approaches love, love in which the irrationality of woman and of man meet in infinity, in which phantasy, extravagance, golden fiction, or rather golden laughter at all that is dull and true, are eternal and unconquerable, love which never calls itself what it is——! Adolescence makes an ordinary young miss into a princess more poetical than any princess; and transfigures this world, which is really old, really very old, into a thing new and strange, in which even what is utilitarian becomes marvelous and æsthetic. The lover "walks on air" with the flimsy excuse that he loves and is loved by a mere woman, one among the many millions who love or are loved on this star. He is raised to a unique capacity for life; he does the most foolish, most heroic things; and is generous even to the length of throwing away his life for the safety of his beloved's. This is because life has suddenly become play. It is no longer a matter of mere necessity, of mere task and duty. An immemorial exuberance of life fills everything, so

that the world is "transfigured"; and at the same time the lover, to whom existence has become a mere beautiful agon, can cast off his life simply because to do this might appear the most beautiful thing. Out of this world of enchanted folly comes renewed life. Life is rooted in all these wiles, fictions, and divine butterfly coqueties. It comes to being in the guise of play; and play is the immemorial name given to procreation in the vulgar common speech of the English.

This play of love is a conflict, but that is because every game is a conflict. The duel of the sexes was invented by men and women that the game of love might be possible, and that all delights should be opened to them. Love could not exist without the hunter and the hunted, the winning of the woman, even when she wants to be won, and the other devices; therefore Love created them. The attractions which women (naïvely and infallibly) radiate around them when they wish to be loved by a man, reason could easily expose and smile coldly at; they are only justified, only seductive, as play, and men can never resist play. Woman must be capable of infinite foolishness, of heroism in foolishness in order to awaken love in man, make him forget his vigilant reason, and light the radiant abyss of folly within him. All that we call charm in a woman is more or less graceful folly. The

problem of marriage is the problem of how much folly two people must have in order to live happily together. Without a little reason they would not remain long together, it is true; but if they had not an inexhaustible fountain of folly, their lives would be full of shame and sordid necessities. In the end, they would procreate *pro bono publico*; sex would appear to them a utilitarian thing, existing "for the sake of the children." That makes everything unclean. Love is only great when it is regarded as pure play; and procreation is only then beautiful. To set beauty at the threshold of life we must conceive life as play.

## XII

### THE AFFIRMATION OF SUFFERING

There recurs throughout the literature of the nineteenth century a note which in the times preceding it was sounded rarely, and then unwillingly. One may call it for convenience the affirmation of suffering. This dogma is not identical with the theological notion that suffering is sent from God to chastise man or to teach him, and in either case has to be welcomed. This has been believed since the beginning of society at least, and in certain quarters is believed still. The condonation of suffering which it enjoined was a duty, or if it turned out to be a failure as a duty, then an ideal; it was a second thought about pain and not a spontaneous response to it.

Now the original and individual thing about the affirmation of suffering was that it seemed to be a simple and direct response, almost a natural reaction. Instead of lamenting his calamities the sufferer rejoiced in them, immediately and spontaneously. This attitude was not so strong as to color the entire literature of the last cen-

ture; all the writers of that time did not react to pain in precisely that manner; but a greater proportion of them did than had ever done so before. In our own time this attitude is becoming more and more common, and there are few among the younger writers who are without it. What all this means; whether this attitude towards pain is good or bad; whether it is really an affirmation of life or not; and how it comes to be expressed at all, seeing that men naturally avoid pain, are questions of almost unique psychological interest.

The affirmation of suffering is not to be found in the natural effusion of anguish which filled Europe during the Romantic period with melodious cries. Shelley was not affirming suffering when he wrote:

Out of the day and night

A joy has taken flight:

Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar

Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight

No more—O never more!

Nor was de Musset when he exclaimed:

*Pourquoi dans ton œuvre céleste*

*Tant d'éléments si peu d'accord?*

*A quoi bon le crime et la peste?*

*O Dieu juste! pourquoi la mort?*

Nor was Tennyson, "crying in the night," and like a Victorian infant having a good cry while he was about it. Nor was Browning when he tried to prove that everything was for the best, including poisonings, disappointed love and occasional suicide. About these expressions there is nothing abnormal, nothing paradoxical; they are on the highroad of traditional human feeling. The affirmation of suffering, then, is not found here. No; it is found where Ibsen makes his Skald say in "The Pretenders" that a poet may be blessed equally in a great joy or a great sorrow. Or in passages which everybody must remember in Dostoyevsky, Heine and Nietzsche in which the ecstasy of pain is uttered in terms which might fit the ecstasy of joy. Or, to come down to our own age, in analogous passages in D'Annunzio, Jack London, Mr. G. B. Shaw, Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. D. H. Lawrence—in almost any writer of the present day who is concerned seriously with life. The romantic attitude to suffering, the attitude of Shelley and of de Musset, has as a convention passed, and instead of it we have now (as a convention) this attitude of affirmation.

The more we regard this attitude the more questionable it appears. It *seems* to be the most unconditional and heroic affirmation possible of life in all its aspects; and there is no doubt that

in great men it is nothing else than this. Profound spirits have a fundamental need to declare that "nature" in itself is good, nature pure and unsublimated, nature before it has been transformed to the use and the image of man. For in affirming that nature is good, they affirm unconsciously at the same time that eventually and unconditionally it can be controlled by man and turned to his ends. To say this is not to state a mere psychological hypothesis. It is to state what must be, the nature of man being what it is. For man is ineluctably anthropocentric; he is constituted by evolution and by himself the centre of reference for all created things; he must give meaning, and *his* meaning, to chaos, evil, "nature." The affirmation of suffering when it is uttered by great men, *must* therefore have a human meaning, and express human and not merely blind will. It is a necessary affirmation, the fundamental axiom of a victorious attitude to life. It is the promise of life to man, and man's promise to life. Yet it is not mere promise, it is fulfillment at the same time; for in affirming the terrible aspects of nature the spirit deals with them, controls them, and demonstrates constantly its mastery.

Now it is clear that only the greatest artists, the most intrepid thinkers, can rise to an af-



firmation of this kind. How then can one explain the almost universal affirmation of suffering among writers to-day?—rejecting as we must the hypothesis that they are all by a fortunate accident of time in the first rank. What the present generation of writers expresses is an affirmation which while superficially resembling the affirmation of tragedy is in reality its antithesis. The essential quality of tragic affirmation is creativeness, a positive, active, formative grappling with pain; a personal æsthetic triumph over the world. It is this sense of personal triumph that is absent in the fashionable affirmations of to-day. Suffering is affirmed without a simultaneous affirmation of personality; it is affirmed against human individuality, against whatever is reasonable, controlled, formed; against human power and human freedom. It is affirmed in everything which imprisons, tortures or shatters the individual—in “life” as a purely irrational, irresponsible and arbitrary thing. This is a negation of what empire men have already established over life, a denial of the whole creative function of mankind.

Yet in this affirmation there is strangely a note of triumph. What can it be that is victorious here? To discover this we must look into one of the most questionable masks of art. Art is

expression; expression is freedom and triumph: art is therefore victory, fulfillment. But although art is expression, and triumph and freedom, it is not always integral, complete freedom, absolute triumph. By weak, imperfectly integrated, and tragically disintegrated natures a complete, firm chord of expression can not be struck. Only a part is affirmed, satisfying itself, but leaving the soul bitter and craving. Often this fraction which is expressed is evil, anti-human, Satanic. Baudelaire was a great artist; there were in his poetry the marks of an obscure rejoicing, an indubitable ecstasy, but that ecstasy was the utterance of what was most evil in him, what the complementary human part of him hated and despised. Thence his dissatisfaction, the avidity of his suffering, which he could not mollify, which art itself intensified more and more, driving him finally to madness. That was Baudelaire's "affirmation of suffering," as it was that of the decadents who followed him. But the malady of our time is less great, less perverted, more mediocre, perhaps more dangerous; for while Baudelaire could infect only those souls that were as great as his own, our contemporary *malaise* can infect anyone—and has, indeed, infected anyone. The part of man's nature which is expressed and which rejoices in the modern

affirmation of suffering is the irrational, irresponsible, impersonal will to live which lies underneath the personality, which is not integrated, not formed; mere chaotic existence.

This affirmation is shown on the plane of action as passivity and whim; on that of thought as guess, intuition, fluidity; on that of sentiment as receptivity, effeminacy, dependence. The creative act of personality, of responsibility, has not yet been taken. Men praise what tortures, disintegrates and brings destruction upon themselves. They affirm whatever is not themselves; they affirm life, but not their own life. Yet this is called "affirmation," and by all except those who look at it twice is accepted in good faith.

Thus it is that one understands why in works which are apparently full of faith in life—in the works, for example, of Mr. D. H. Lawrence—there transpires a sentiment of such overwhelming melancholy, such final hopelessness. What Mr. Lawrence expresses—and I have selected him because he is the extreme expression of a type, and therefore the most typical of all—is faith in all life that is not the life of personality, of synthesis, of order, of fulfillment. I am not speaking now of a writer here and there; I am speaking of almost every imaginative artist of the present day, for this unconscious

attitude can be discerned in them all. They are nihilists, and the more dangerous for not knowing it. Their popularity is disquieting; it points to a disintegration of personality which must be general.

### XIII

## AGAINST PROFUNDITY

THE intellectual and artistic character of the present age, in so far as we who are part of it can consciously pose it, and granting the assumption that we can know it at all, is a tremendous and tortured desire, among all writers—I do not include under the term Mr. W. L. George or any of the other hard-working novelists—to descend into their own depths, to explore what has hitherto been “beneath the threshold” of artistic expression, and to remain there, to establish there a kingdom of art, an interesting, sad and intense kingdom of the blind. What is new about these writers is not that they explore the unconscious and bring it to the light: Dostoyevsky long ago did more wonderful things in that way than will probably ever be done again. What is new is that they descend into the unconscious; search, sense, feel with all the subtle, subterranean faculties which awaken in the darkness; but they do not use their eyes (for in the gloom their eyes are of no use); neither do they take a lantern with them, because dark-

ness seems more interesting to them than light, and because—but to go on would be to take a psychological header into chaos still deeper than their own. The most interesting of these writers are, in America, Mr. Sherwood Anderson; in England, Mr. D. H. Lawrence; and in Dublin, New York, Fiume and Paris, Mr. James Joyce. Mr. Anderson is the most conscious and most human of the three; Mr. Joyce the most an artist, and Mr. Lawrence the most ecstatic, violent, amazing and Promethean—without the light in the fire. These writers, and Mr. Lawrence especially, have had an influence on their contemporaries; they have evoked a new artistic possibility, and one which is evidently attractive to their generation, and the novelists of the time are not so much imitating them as working with the same tools in the same field.

Almost side by side with this movement in art, if one can call that a movement which goes vertically down, there has developed the new method in the science of psychology which is called psycho-analysis. This method has been salutary in many cases; in other cases, perhaps, anything but salutary: there is not yet sufficient impartiality among the “analyzed” for us to be sure about the latter. The significant thing is that as a method it is popular. Now to any normal and exquisitely sane person it must have ap-

peared—one is compelled to use the past tense—as the most paradoxical, the most desperate means which could be used for healing deranged psyches; indeed the very last means, to be embraced only when every other had failed. All healthy things, all things which, however sick they may be, have the instinct of health, seek the light, and feel that in the light there is healing. The popularity of psycho-analysis shows—well, what does it show except that, among the intelligent and refined, the instinct of men has set in the other direction, that in order to gain health they now burrow into the darkness, into their own black lonely chaos, to chart and exhaust it finally, so that it shall no longer attract, torture and flout them? They unconsciously desire to sterilize their unconscious and not to bring it to fruition in the light. They strive to attain health by becoming more sick, by exhausting all the possibilities of sickness, until there is nothing but health left. This is a most unnatural way of getting well; but it is the orthodox method of psycho-analysis, and what the effect of this method is on the unconscious is a question which opens that abyss beneath every other abyss, which one must be prepared for and avoid when one sets out at all in this direction. To analyze psycho-analysis itself, to show what it unconsciously desires and wills, is the necessary



next step for any psychologist who accepts the validity of psycho-analysis.

These two intellectual or rather, psychological, or rather, physiological movements—we are getting nearer the truth and the flesh—arose, then, at the same time, and they arose out of a common source. The attitude which enables Mr. D. H. Lawrence to write as he does is the only attitude which could have made the discovery of the psycho-analytic method possible. Without this deliberately unintellectual, semi-conscious, semi-grammatical attitude towards the unconscious, dreams could not have been interpreted as Dr. Freud has interpreted them. To understand dreams one must be half asleep: Mr. Lawrence, too, is half grammatical, half asleep, when he is most eloquent. The effect of "Sons and Lovers" is different, it is true, from a week's analysis; but the method is the same, and in psycho-analysis the method is the chief thing. The immense popularity of psycho-analysis has not been on account of the cures it has found for neuroses, but on account of its method; and the study of psycho-analysis has in our time become perhaps only another way of becoming neurotic, of going down into one's unconscious, and finally of "going down."

These, then, are the two chief intellectual expressions of this new movement of the modern

soul. They have several common attributes, of which the most obvious is an obsession with sex, and a statement of it in terms which are unpleasant. In Dr. Freud's analyses of dreams and in Mr. Lawrence's numerous descriptions of orgasms there is always something which, in the accepted sense of the word—and here the accepted thing is actually the thing—is filthy. With Dr. Freud as well as with Mr. Lawrence's heroes, physical love is without a good conscience, however zealous both writers are to write about it with rigid frankness. Freud certainly writes about it with calm and slickness, but it is the calm, not of a man with a good conscience, but of one who has encountered nastiness so continually that he has become habituated to it. His attitude towards it is that of an undertaker towards death, or a parson towards marriage: one can not here talk of cleanliness, one is simply on professional grounds. Mr. Lawrence, with his ungoverned emotionality, has not yet been able to write calmly of sex, though he has written of very little else: he is troubled by it, and his poetry and his novels are the expression of a continual and disguised, but violent, state of nerves.

Now the perversity, strained curiosity, and bad conscience in this attitude towards sex is generally resumed under the summary term

“neurotic”—a word which we need nowadays, but which we love more than we need. What does one mean by neurotic? It is precisely the descent into oneself instead of development outward: it is, first, desire for darkness and concealment; then fear of them; and finally the intense, silent struggle in the deepening toils. The problem is whether man attains his fulfillment by throwing himself out into existence, and thereby achieving his real form, or by knowing himself, by exploring his own chaos; and it is the great modern problem, the extreme results of which we are working out in our own time and in ourselves. By modern I mean modern on a grand scale. For the Greeks the problem did not exist, except in one or two philosophers’ heads. It was created in Europe by ascetic Christian priests, that is to say, by men who already by their vow of celibacy, by one step away from life, were interdicted the full expression of themselves outward, and who had to create this new but gloomy infinite into which to cast themselves. These madmen of the Absolute came in some cases to acknowledge only two persons in the universe, God and themselves; and their retreat into deserts and waste places was in reality an attempt to live in a vacuum, in a closed and sealed invisible chamber, in which there were only themselves and God. This notion that one

attains happiness, or salvation, within oneself, was strong in the Middle Ages, and it needed that tremendous carnival of the eye (and of the other senses) which we call the Renaissance, to overcome it for three centuries. For the last hundred years or so this impulse has been weakening; there has been more and more a tendency among writers and other men to descend into themselves; to be subjective in a new, and in a very old, sense. The conflict between the ideal of the Renaissance and that of ascetic religion—we call it by other names but it is this—is still unsolved in our time. The intellectuals of our time are, most of them, belated and somewhat depraved monks, unsure whether they are not, after all, sensualists. Ascetic religion and the Renaissance, but in a state of uncertainty, unsynthesized, perhaps merely confused, both exist in them together. Yet the issue between these two attitudes is quite clear. The one is a matter of attaining form: the other of discovering content. Now form can be attained, but content can not be discovered.

Modern psychology enables us to understand in a new sense the anchorite of past times and our own intellectuals. The reason why St. Anthony had nightmare-visions and Mr. D. H. Lawrence writes out of a constant nightmare of sex is that they both go down deliberately into

their unconscious, and to go down there deliberately is to make it unclean. Man is a sea in which all riches are hidden; but if he pries into it the most beautiful things turn into slime, and the freest, happiest creatures into frightened monsters who, with the furtive courage of things which are watched, turn at last and attack him. One can not discover what one is, because one's very self makes distorting grimaces, out of some mysterious instinct. Perhaps it would be a violation of ourselves if we could know ourselves.

Purity is a matter of tempo; it is impossible for those who can not run fast and far. "Expect poison from standing water." To throw oneself out, for ever and always; to strive upward into sharper light and air; to become always more distinct and yet more intense; to make, by action, every potentiality actual; to turn all one's senses, thoughts and imaginings outward to the sun, knowing that the inward spring is inexhaustible; to attain absolute, definite clearness, with not one veil of "profundity," of imprisoning, beclouding self-examination and introspection—but I am describing a demigod. It is only men who approximate to this adumbration, I mean, who have the power of refreshing us. Whether they are mighty, flashing beings like Homer, Shakespeare, Mozart, Goethe, worlds and suns in themselves, or mere radiant

humanity like Cellini and Casanova, these alone bring entire satisfaction to us, and refresh us without that residue of sadness and ill-health which there is in all saviors. In Cellini we see what human nature is; in Marcus Aurelius we do not see even that, but a pedant of morality, laboriously misunderstanding everything, so that at last his very instincts speak in a disguised voice, out of pure fright at that terrifying observer. But in Mozart and especially in "Die Zauberflöte," we are told, infallibly, with the certainty of normal humanity, and in the most delightful of all forms of utterance, in music, what man, aristocracy, marriage, purity, religion, art, work, play, wisdom, folly—what the highest and the commonest things are. In Shakespeare, not with the same serenity and health, but still divinely, we have defined for ever these things; in Shakespeare, of whom John Eglinton has said that he is entirely without "the religious sense." Had he been "religious" indeed all that is natural could not have come like birds to his call, and displayed itself so securely and naturally in his works. Life would be impossible for us without Shakespeare, Mozart, Homer, Goethe, who have opened the second book of revelation to us, who have revealed human nature, the passions, the intellect, the soul, in their spontaneous flowering; and in so doing have shown us the



things which to the struggling, paradoxical creature, man, remain the most securely locked mysteries, the things most difficult to see in their simplicity and ingenuousness. Life is comprehended only in the throwing of it outward, cleanly and completely; what introspection shows us is only what introspection itself has tortured and thwarted, the suffering, passive body of our vivisectioned selves.

Yet what portentous, sublime things have been accomplished by introspection! How marvelously asceticism and self-examination have "deepened" the soul! How much more rich and paradoxical, and therefore fascinating, the modern soul is than that of the whole antique world! Even Nietzsche, who fought always on the other side, acknowledged this. It is possible, however, that he surrendered this point a little cheaply. How, after all, can the soul be "deepened"? The soul is unfathomable, beyond all computation, beyond all conception, of depth and height; and the chasms which St. Augustine and Pascal found in it were only, could be only, the gigantic shadows of tremendous fears, gulfs of darkness concealing the smiling infinity. The soul is unfathomable; it can only be expressed. Dostoyevsky has been written of as the last word in the book of introspection. This is psychologically a mistake which Dostoyevsky him-



self would never have committed. He did not gain his terrible clairvoyance in psychology by turning his eye inward; it was with him a piece of sheer imagination, second sight, whereby what was unconscious in men became to him conscious. Nietzsche, in one of his aphorisms, gives his own experience in this matter: by introspection he could never have become a psychologist, he said. The psychological novel is, in spite of appearances, one of the least introspective forms of art: it is concerned not only with other people's actions but with the hidden movements behind them, and it requires in its adepts a capacity to be uniquely and vigilantly conscious. This is how the soul has been enriched and diversified; not by a withdrawal into itself, but by an expression outward which breaks one bond after another, and in which the hidden riches of one's soul rise up and are revealed. Then every paradox is a delight, a spangled, laughing cross of life, the eternal cross, the cross which has not to be borne.

Stendhal alone perhaps has written of this: Stendhal the ironical and ecstatic observer of spontaneity, almost the whole beauty of whose novels consists in this, that in them all the characters throw themselves outward, express all their passions, with the infallible grace of nature. To do this alone, this simply, is to attain

beauty! Perhaps what we long for, or rather shall long for in another hundred years—Stendhal was optimistic when he said he would be understood about 1880—is a world which will attain on a great scale the temper and the beauty of Stendhal's miniature world. The clear line and the sure gesture are the greatest things that can be attained: for these are beauty.

## XIV

### THE REIGN OF SUPERSTITION

IT is a paradox of history that the last thing about an age which is known by those who live in it, is its plain and obvious characteristics. The nuances of our common spiritual existence are platitudes to us; but what lies—so clearly!—underneath these, what gives a whole world its character, only a succeeding generation looking across a hundred years can tell.

The explanation of this, as of every paradox, is simple. The variations in a common existence can be objectively perceived, simply because they are variations, and are outside the norm; but the obvious, the general, is invincibly subjective; even the exceptions are exceptions *within* it. The norm is fatally taken for granted, or, rather, it is more than taken for granted: it is the unconscious and invisible net in which men and societies live and move and have their being. Consequently, an age can discover its nature only by flying over itself—a difficult thing, but not impossible; it has often been done, and it has not been done oftener, chiefly because it is seldom at-

tempted. The attempt is unique in this, that it seeks to discover not the most subtle and profound truths about itself, but the most obvious. One must not rest until one finds the most obvious thing in the world, if one is to discover the truth about one's age. For the study of other ages the opposite method may be required; but that need not concern us so immediately, for our own life is after all our most pressing concern. We have survived other ages, but we can not survive our own.

First one must not assume that the obvious is the expected. On the contrary; it has generally an appearance of profundity, and it is sometimes incredible. Nothing can be more striking than the awe, the sense of illumination which the simplest sayings of great men, of Heraclitus, of Christ, of Leonardo, of Pascal, awaken periodically and eternally in the minds of men. It is not that these sayings are difficult; they arouse wonder, indeed, because they are incredibly simple, so simple that it is almost impossible for people to think them. For man is misunderstood so long as we do not conceive him as the most complex animal, perhaps the only animal to whom the truth comes always as a surprise.

The truth about our own age, therefore, one hardly likes to mention; it will appear incredible, too simple, and considering the character of the

period, disappointing. Yet our general character can be described in a few words: everywhere and always we feel mystery rather than curiosity before things. To say this is to say that we are superstitious. A single glance—alas, we are generally incapable of a *single* glance—is sufficient to tell us that we habitually ignore the plain truth about everything. It is true, we study things more thoroughly and more seriously than any generation which has preceded ours; we are bolder in descending into abysses; but our quest is always absurdly concluded with a heterodox prayer, in which the reign of mystery, the chief inhibition of man in all ages, is affirmed. Thus our study of nature and of ourselves is fatally stultified. For the temptation to carry darkness even into the quest of light is almost unconquerable.

To take an obvious illustration, those of us who did our sums correctly at school must remember that the condition of doing them at all was a conviction that there was no mystery in arithmetic. That conviction, almost by its own virtue, carried us through. On the other hand, what stultified the dull boys was not sheer stupidity, but the paralyzing belief that in arithmetic there was something occult, that both the problem and the result were mysterious, and not that the one was as simple as the other. Well, the human

race are without exception dull boys, with a few of them, it is true, heroically struggling against their dullness. Consequently the capacity for inventing mysteries is almost inexhaustible. Politics is a mystery, and to the politicians as much as to the electors. Economics is a mystery, and to the economists most of all. Religion, art, literature, philosophy are mysteries: we have still to discover that in these things two and two make four. Yet, even in religion two and two make four; for without a belief in arithmetic one can not understand the Trinity. But examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely. The attitude is universal; and to designate it the best word is *superstition*.

In the common, unperceived life of our time superstition incarnates itself in a myriad ways. It, and not mere lethargy, makes us tolerate, for instance, the stupid abomination of capital punishment; for we execute men still, not because it does us or them good, but because there is generally thought to be an occult virtue in execution. Our belief in hanging is really a belief in hanging for hanging's sake. Certain intellectuals like Mr. G. K. Chesterton, again, swear by the inviolability of marriage, not because it is the happiest arrangement that can be made, but because they have a superstition which says that the most disgusting things are consum-

mated in heaven. It may be true: certainly if these marriages are consummated at all, it must be in heaven, for the earth has no use for them. But the most diversified arguments (for superstition is prolific in arguments: it can have a thousand where reason can have only one) are used to justify the most inhuman things. Brutalizing labor, slavery, destitution, "the struggle for existence" generally, are justified, not by assessing their natural and obvious results—but by attributing to them a tragic, mystical virtue. When people try to alter this unhappy condition by trying to place reason on the throne of hocus-pocus, they are confronted by the most horrific superstition of all, that of "human nature"; and so their estate is not only made miserable, but the misery is perpetuated.

The struggle between reason and superstition is not a struggle between intelligence and stupidity. The one side is as intelligent as the other; and the superstitious are perhaps the more subtle: compare for example, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, a Voltaire on the wrong side, with the real Voltaire. Natural gifts, intellectual brilliance, may in any age be arrayed in the greater power on one side or the other; but what separates the two forces is a different temper; the one feels curiosity and uses reason on whatever in the world is unsolved; the other feels awe and in-



vents arguments to justify it. Greece and the Europe of the Renaissance believed, and it was the chief source of their glory, that mysteries could be solved. The writers of the last decade in England, to name an infinitely smaller movement, believed in the emancipation of the mind by the use of reason. Our own age does not: the greatest talents are at present ranged on the other side. The school of novelists and poets who are superseding Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells in England are conspicuous negatively for a renunciation of the intellect. They study their age conscientiously and courageously, but, alas, they do not study it with the irreverence of the artist for his subject matter, an irreverence which finds not a mystery, but an incongruity in superstition. Their very seriousness, their very impartiality, prevent them from attaining an emancipated temper: they wish only to experience, without valuing, and while they are intrepid and honest enough to descend into any dungeon, it is a point of honor with them to descend without a lantern. Everywhere mystery! Everywhere respect for mystery! Nowhere the belief that the mind can triumph over the problems of "nature"—for this is ridiculed as a naïve illusion. Yet it is the only belief fit for man, the highest being on earth, in whose hands is the sovereignty of a planet.

The spectacle of man, the most intrepid, rash, arrogant and dauntless of all creatures, who has miraculously half conquered the planet, becoming suddenly pious towards nature, by violating which he has aggrandized himself, sprawling on all fours before the enigma, which, if he is to fulfil his destiny—the mastery over all life—he must solve, must be the strangest and the most shameful which the gods have ever witnessed. At its present age this should fill our species with a sort of personal shame.

But the strangest, the most neurotic, the most paradoxical thing in this comedy, marking man as the most diseased as well as the most daring of animals, as the pathological animal *par excellence*, is that his mysteries and superstitions are gloomy, while the truth is cheerful. Why should he cling to his inferiority and his fear?—for superstition is grounded on inferiority to whatever is enigmatical. It is chiefly because a superstition once established hypnotizes men into believing that it is eternal. Life, it says, is of such and such a nature; and life becomes what it is conceived to be, and actually as such has to be endured. The outcome of this piece of spiritual legerdemain is “human nature,” and “necessity”—mere vulgar fatalism, for life is not what it “is” but what we conceive it to be. Yet once accepted, this conception of life can be made

grand and sublime, all the æsthetic emotions can be gathered round it: but all that, happily, proves nothing, as they say in the Russian novels. It is the saddest trick of that conjuror with a broken heart, man, to teach in song what he has not learnt in suffering, and to glorify with the most beautiful fictions failure, suffering and blindness.

What finally makes a campaign against superstition propitious is not the virtue of the attackers, but a quality in superstition itself: it eventually becomes a burden, and mankind, if sufficient vitality remains in it, is irresistibly driven to throw it off. When it is thrown off, the immediate result is a great sense of relief, a feeling of universal holiday, such as we can still experience in retrospect in regarding the great period of Greece and the Europe of the Renaissance. Events of this kind are really attempts to do what appears to be, but what is not, impossible: to start the world afresh with a clean sheet. In defiance of the axiom that humanity can not become younger, humanity did at those moments become younger; for it is superstition that is old; reason is still young, and Greece and the Renaissance were attempts to begin a new world. If only, then, from the need of a sort of spiritual cleansing, which many of us already feel, the old dispensation of super-

stition will eventually dissolve and disappear, and our age will be finished, and a new age begun.

Already the conditions are in existence which make the near destruction of superstition probable. People do feel superstition as a burden; they do groan under it as Russia groaned under her immemorial chains before the Revolution; and it may be that in other countries a sort of intellectual Russian Revolution will take place; people will simply once for all and irrevocably "hand in their ticket," refuse to carry the old world on their backs any longer, and begin with a new, much smaller, and less complicated one: a world which they will watch night and day lest it should slip out of their mastery. For the virtue of reason is not merely that it emancipates us from the terrors which, long before the time of Lucretius and ever since, superstition has let loose on men; but that by reducing the world to intellectual order it gives us mastery over it. Mystery, awe, reverence, superstition—these are "moods" which affirm and perpetuate the sovereignty of things over man; these are man's greatest inhibitions; but reason in its very constitution is the heroic affirmation of the present and potential mastery of man over things; and as such, it is the eternal truth of man. For man's meaning and destiny—the *only* one which

concerns us on this star—is to attain absolute empire over himself and the world, and in the most complete and unconditional sense, to master Fate. To “be true to the earth,” to use Nietzsche’s phrase, this is the highest possible thing—and it is possible.

## XV

### THE STORY OF THE HUNGRY SHEEP

THE story of the hungry sheep is the oldest in the world. It is in every history that has been written; it is even in the myths—that more naïve and, on the whole, more honest kind of history. To-day, there is not a newspaper which does not tell it. What is this story? It tells that there have existed from the beginning of time two peoples: one, the great multitude, filled with hunger for spiritual bread, blind, but pathetically searching for the light; the other, the few who happen to be able to give the multitude what they need. By a perpetually achieved stroke of luck these two hordes confront each other, individually impotent, mutually consummate, across the orderly, all too orderly centuries. Now, how does it happen that in a world in which every consummation has to be attained in danger and pain this equilibrium should exist, as it were, *a priori*? How is it that the truths which a few exceptional men discover should be desired beforehand by all ordinary men, and should come as a mystical re-

sponse to their need? Truly, history is stranger than fiction.

In reality this picture, the commonplace of history, the commonplace of modern—that is, democratic—thought, is entirely false. The discoverers of great truths and great illusions have created not merely these but the desire of the people for them. The “success” of religions, the fact that they have satisfied a spiritual need of man, is easily understood when we know that they have also created the need they have satisfied. They have made themselves necessary to man—by convincing him that they are necessary. How unutterable is your longing for *us*, they have said; and men have one day discovered within them an unutterable longing. By ennobling the sublimity of the desires which they have awakened, religions have thus done more than any other human power to deepen and subtilize man, and to make him interesting. They have uttered, as Nietzsche divined, the very questions which eventually carry man on an irresistible tide beyond them, and make him free of all religions, and also free from them all. Religion is the great instrument of emancipation from religion; that is, so long as it is living and real. But religion is of value to man only so far as it raises questions within him; makes him discontented, needy, filled with desire; for out of his poverty



he raises himself up, attains a new integration, and in doing so discovers that he has created himself—by no means in his own image, but in that of more heroic minds than his own. This, if anything, is greatness. But, alas! religion also answers questions, and answers them in the most disastrous way—from and to eternity; it puts the spirit in a prison and rolls upon the door the monstrous rock of infinity itself; and this is the greatest sin that can be committed against man. For whatever imprisons is evil; and all religions become prisons sooner or later.

Yet what a day it was when a prophet first proclaimed that man can not live without the truth! What marvelous effects that heroic lie has had! How wonderfully it has etherealized that heavy clod, man, filling him with desires not out of himself, alien desires, which fashioned for themselves a heaven and the wings to fly into it! But everything was ruined when the same prophet proceeded to give man and his heirs to the end of time the truth for which they longed. For the truths of the father, alas! are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations, even of those who hate them.

Let us return to the hungry sheep. It is said in all seriousness that they can not live without the truth. They can not be happy in a lie! Yet the Baptist believes that without being ducked

in a tank no man can "go to heaven"; and he is more proud of this belief than of anything else. What men—that is, the majority of men—really desire, of course, is not truth, but certainty. They long for a truth which will make the search for truth unnecessary. They wish things to be settled, so that they need not think again about them. So long, therefore, as a hypothesis, no matter how unbelievable it is, settles things, they will believe in it; and if their mind balks at the decision, their desires will gladly supersede it. The extravagant and absurd faiths of mankind have "worked" not because they are credible, but because when men want to have a feeling of security, nothing which gives it to them can be incredible. The most abstruse metaphysical systems and the most simple theological creeds have thus for men the most omnipotent attraction, that of certainty. To be told that things are finally so and so, that it is not only unnecessary but wicked to search further; this is to the multitude bliss, salvation, a foretaste of paradise itself. It is not the voice of the spirit, but the chorus of the desires which acclaim and crown with universality a truth.

When we listen to the real searcher for truth we seem to be hearing for the first time a foreign language, one which must be painfully learned. For the searcher for truth does not *wish* to find

certainly in the things he discovers; he is at a loss if he reaches what appears to be an end. He desires the quest of truth to be eternal, and he is overjoyed when he meets the unexpected, the incredible, the exception to all known laws, for thus his sense of adventure is eternally aroused and again aroused. He is not interested in what is known, but only in what might be known, what is still to be discovered, what is possible or even impossible; and rather than state over again what has already been formulated, he will be content simply with asking questions, or he will break up the stale formulæ of knowledge and cast suspicion on everything, so that he may awaken doubt, increase chance, and create for himself a new realm of freedom, of adventure and discovery.

How is it still possible, then, to believe that between these two classes of men, the multitude and the seekers for truth, there is a preordained harmony of need and fulfillment? How could it ever have been possible to believe this? Or, rather, out of what could this belief have arisen? Out of that mysterious weakness of man which makes him translate even his greatest and most spontaneous deeds into duties. It is not enough that one should search for the truth; one must justify it by reference to man. One must serve or appear to serve. Every one must have a

master—the masters most of all; and there are only two masters finally, God and “the people.” Now, however, when God is worshipped less universally than he once was, the master of all men is the people; whatever is done “for the people” is alone justified. So the thinker must not only love the truth; he must do so “for the people.” By this happy arrangement everybody is given a master. The discoverer of truth is the master of the multitude, and the multitude is the master of the searcher for truth. Thus, in the mere necessity of duty, the glory and the spontaneity of creation are extinguished. This is the curse which abases to impotence the human spirit in our time. While the thinker justified himself only to God, mankind could still be regarded not merely as something for whom, but as something with whom a creative aim might be realized. But mankind is no longer an instrument out of which great will and great love can evoke a harmony, but a multitudinous Babel, to which the thinker must set his ear in order to tell it what itself is. This, disguise it as we may, is the impotence not only of exceptional men, but of the multitude itself.

The time has come when we must overcome this lie or be overcome by it. Thinkers, artists and men of action can no more do anything with the world; and the only thing we know about

the world is that it can do nothing with itself. The constant attribute of the multitude is neither affirmation nor negation: it is indifference. The people are neither positive nor negative, but they can become either. This is what every leader, temporal or spiritual, has known; this intuition, along with a love unconditional, and justifying itself to nothing above or beneath the sun, has made it possible for them to give the drama of humanity a meaning. But the greatest men are not strong enough to admit this to themselves; they need "the people," not that they may serve it, but that they may put it between themselves and their masterlessness. They do not need to serve: they need simply a master. They can not endure—for in every one there is a slave—the terrible knowledge that there is nothing to which they are responsible except their own spirit; that their deeds justify themselves, or are not justified by any tribunal. Yet this is the truth, hitherto the bitterest, but some day to become perhaps the saving truth. The creative thinker does not need salvation; he brings it: this some day he must acknowledge. The leader is led by no one; there are men only behind, but not before him; there is nothing that is known; this some day must be acknowledged. The great man is not justified by serving the multitude but by molding it to his desire; thus both are saved; this must

be known some day as the truth. The multitude alone, and not the exception, needs justification, unconsciously cries out to be shaped, to have its indifference weighed down to one side or the other, that its destiny might be decided. But those whose fate it should be to redeem the multitude—the guiltless if they but knew it—themselves crave justification, and from the multitude. Nothing more sad than this comedy has ever been enacted; for in it humanity not only remains helpless, but constantly achieves helplessness.

The power to create and to value has to-day sunk so low that whatever truths strengthen it, or even give it encouragement, must be proclaimed again and again. The exceptional man has become so powerless; his meaning, his *raison d'être* as an exception, has been forgotten so completely both by men and by himself, that he must be defended, he must be given the confidence to become what he is. His fetter is to be forged by the intellect, the great leveler, the grand democrat; and what the intellect has bound it can still unloose. For it is a lie which the intellect itself now points out to us, that great thoughts come because the poor in spirit desire them; that rare minds are the servants of the vulgar; that the creative deeds of the spirit are mere tasks,

a despairing attempt to fill up an abyss of human need which is insatiable.

The creative man creates, and has always created, because he desires to enrich and to shape the world. If men desire what he has created, he himself has awakened that desire in them, that through it the work of his hands might triumph. The world can still be shaped by those who are great enough to do not what the world needs, but what they will the world should need. Creation is spontaneous through and through; it is utterly omnipotent and utterly free. Great religions have not been dictated by the need of the world; they have dictated to the world its need for them. Thus they have transformed the world. Whoever can still plant in the hearts of men a new need will be a creator and a transfigurer of men; and who can doubt that there are transformations possible yet? The creative spirit of man is free if it would but know itself.



## XVI

### IN DEFENSE OF NEW TRUTHS

MY thesis in this essay is brief, and perhaps nobody will agree with it. It is that new truths are better than old, simply and baldly because they are new. They may or may not be more true than the old, but we have still to know the truth about truth. Pilate set the question a long time ago, and ever since men have been trying to answer it—and we still wait for an answer. But in the present era of spiritual poverty and need, a more momentous and, happily, a more easy problem demands our attention: what is living or, at any rate, what is about to live? What has the possibility of life in it? Are new truths more vital than old ones; and, if they are, do they stand in need of justification? Can they fight for themselves, or must we come to their aid?

During the decade and a half which preceded the European war—the decade whose chief spokesmen in England were Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells, and whose antitheses, not less characteristic, were Mr. Chesterton and

Mr. Belloc—the enthusiasm for “new ideas” was boundless; they were not only discussed as intellectual news; they were believed in; and the dawn of a new world was then prophesied perhaps a little too frequently. That time has quietly but definitely disappeared. The phrase “new ideas” has acquired a different connotation and a new atmosphere. Where it was once associated with faith, distinction, and sincerity, it is now associated with insincerity, provincialism and cant. Partly this reaction has been caused by the war, which has made every new hope appear idle compared with the terrible necessity of the present; partly it has been caused by the inadequacy of the new truths which before the war were struggling to realization; and partly, perhaps, by the insufficiency and bigotry of the “new” men themselves. Certainly these “new” men were unjust not merely to the past—a natural unfairness—but to each other, and what effect that unfairness has had is still to be computed. We have not yet receded far enough from the era of Shaw and Wells to appraise it properly; and certainly we are the worst possible generation to criticize it, for it is we who are still reacting against it.

To-day the position is this: that the very men who a generation ago would have been followers, or, at any rate camp-followers, of Mr. Shaw are

now, by an almost mechanical necessity, his antagonists. The reaction to new ideas is now exactly the opposite of what it was; and the youngest articulate generation quarrel with Mr. Shaw not because he is old but precisely because he is new. This does not mean, however, that they have gone over to Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc; by no means: they regard these two gentlemen, and with truth, as the mere antitheses of Messrs. Shaw and Wells. Mr. Chesterton, for one, needed a positive modern atmosphere in order to shine; and since the darkening of the intellectual sky, his orb has also been overcast. He can not do anything without Mr. Shaw, and since Mr. Shaw has taken to saying little, Mr. Chesterton goes about with a disconcerted, lost air. His world was really the modern world and not the Roman Catholic Church, and now that the modern world has fallen to pieces, he is as homeless as the remainder of us.

Now what does this distrust of new truths mean? For it can be only a symptom when truths are preferred, as they always seem to be, because they are new or because they are old. What unconscious conclusion has been drawn in the unknown spirits of men when a theory because it is new is discredited, or because it is old is, with a touch of hard and defiant conventionality, affirmed? The conclusion seems to be

this, that it is no longer possible to create; that truths are closed—elastically, it is true, and with an allowance for “fresh interpretations” of them; that spiritually we must “tighten our belts,” confine ourselves within the limits of all the dogmas which have been; and “recognize,” instead of making, reality.

But this means that we have lost living faith in ourselves and in our fate, and that we have lapsed back into what is established and finished for all time. We believe in our fathers, or perhaps in our grandfathers, but not in ourselves. Many things have predisposed us to this belief, but chiefly our realization of the terrible strength of the accomplished fact and of our own spiritual weakness and poverty in front of it. This alone constitutes the hopelessness of our present state. “In order to achieve happiness,” said Pierre Bezukov, in “War and Peace,” “it is necessary to believe in the possibility of happiness.” But to us at present new horizons for humanity do not seem any longer possible, and therefore they are for the moment impossible. Yet they would immediately become possible if we once believed them to be so; for faith alone can remove the inevitable, the mountain of artificial necessity.

This, then, is how the matter stands. There is an unconscious conspiracy against new truths

which is, in effect, the expression of a disbelief in the power of man to go further than he has gone and in his capacity to discover anew and thus to create. Men are returning to the old dogmas not because they discover a new meaning in them, but because "everybody knows that they are true," and because in them, moreover, there is provided a stick wherewith one may strike to the heart of whatever inconvenient hopes and aspirations one may still possess, and so end the unhappy business. But even where one finds new meanings in old truths, it is always to the further glorification of the old; and the implication always is: "How wise these old thinkers were in comparison with us!" This attitude is romantic, and we should have grown out of it before now. It is unjust to ourselves, for whatever living truth we may discover in ancient words we may be sure that we have first put it there. Our unconscious riches are always greater than our conscious; and like blind fools we enrich the past with our eyes shut, that when we open them we may be abashed to discover how rich it is. This turning back, this hatred of what we are and must become, is the greatest perversity of which humanity is capable. In the strictest sense, it makes life of no account.

Every truth that is living will get itself said in new terms; that is the test of its vitality, its

spontaneous creative power. If we utter even our most intimate and impregnable truths in the same words twenty separate times, we will feel with dismay that we no longer believe them. A truth, like all living things, must renew its shell as well as its kernel, or it shrivels and dies within the last husk which it has created for itself. This is certain, because the greatest thing to men on this earth is not truth but realization; the living of the truth at every moment, not in mere remembrance and acknowledgment, but in action, thought, emotion, life. But this realization can not utter itself in the dry and withered voice of the past, even of the greatest past; for what it has to say is its own, is the ineffable Becoming of the human spirit, is constant new birth, constant regeneration. In the foolishness of happiness it will often say something idle and frivolous (and how many modern truths are not idle?), but nevertheless the truth is in it, as certainly as the truth is not in those who return with cold and closed hearts to "the truth." For those who are ready to support "new truths" (because they feel the spirit of truth within them, and believe, therefore, that "new truths" are possible) do not deny the great truths of the past; on the contrary, they understand them better than those who make them a crutch, as much for the injury of others as for their own support.

Those who believe only in the dogmas of the past, on the other hand, deny everything, for they deny the spontaneous spirit within themselves out of which has arisen every truth. To be without faith in the possibility of realization and happiness for humanity is to be with nothing: to believe that realization is possible is to be the dupe, perhaps, of a thousand lies, but it is to possess all the wisdom of which man is capable. This must be true if life is not a blunder from beginning to end. To think otherwise, indeed, is to make life a blunder.

To-day, then, it is not only expedient to support new truths against old; it is necessary. Of what avail to us any longer are the great truths of the past? They lie open to us; we know them all; but in spite of this we are not fundamentally interested in them. Never has culture, intellect, knowledge, been more common and more barren than it is to-day. Truth is arid because we no longer create it and by creating realize its nature. The truth of the past is dead to us because the spirit of truth is dead within ourselves. To be, then, on the side of "new truths," however shallow they may be, in the faith that creation is the law of existence, the way of humanity, and that if man but creates he will one day create his own greatness and happiness; that is the way of the old dangerous and ultimate wisdom.



"Modern truths" may be shallow, but to condemn them is still more shallow. Let us, therefore, support new truths against old dogmas, simply because they are new, and in being new are a mark of life, of health and of unconscious wisdom. This at least is sure, and it is the most modern of truths, that we must be wise unconsciously before we can be wise consciously.

## XVII

### AGAINST THE WISE

THE myth of Faust has not yet been stated in modern terms. Legends far older, the legends of ancient Greece and prehistoric Germany, have risen from their old graves, in new bodies, and clothed in new raiment; and Apollo, Dionysus, Prometheus and Siegfried have become not only modern but typically modern. But Faust, even after Goethe's attempt to transfigure him, remains unconquerably mediæval; and a great theme is still left for a genius bold enough to attack it.

Bold enough, for the theme is one which demands above all boldness. The problem of Faust is the problem of wisdom; and our attitude to wisdom has changed radically in the last hundred years. Nowadays we prize only that kind of wisdom which former ages held in horror. In all ages a belief has existed that this kind of wisdom is a dangerous thing; that in being wise a man lives on familiar terms with evil, that he is more intimate with the devil than other men are. And this is true; we, in this generation, who, when we philosophize, constantly question the

foundations of good and evil, should be the last to deny it. The philosopher, the hero of reason, must listen even to the devil for the sake of truth, and perhaps of other things; he must be benevolently neutral to him, although he knows beforehand that Satan is a good advocate. This is precisely the problem stated in *Faust*, but it is stated in terms which violate our modern instincts and shock our modern wisdom. We no longer believe that in allying himself with the devil *Faust* was damned; we believe on the contrary that precisely in doing that, he was saved. *Faust* was not a spiritual fool betrayed by his intellectual pride; he was the type of the great philosopher, the first philosopher in whom philosophy transcended itself. This is what the knowledge of our time justifies us in seriously thinking. *Faust* is the incarnation of that profound wisdom which turns against wisdom; which seeks to express, not in words, but in Being itself, a complete affirmation of life.

The philosopher, having created Satan, must transform him; wisdom, having raised the devil, must raise him still higher. To make this clear, a few truisms have to be stated. First, then, there is recognized by all thinkers a tremendous and fundamental incongruity between wisdom and what we in our time call "Life." Life, they see, is a ceaseless pushing forward, a continuous crea-

tion of the new and the unique. It is itself nothing else than this eternal Becoming, this eternal newness and uniqueness. It is a thing not arbitrary but necessary and inexorable; it can not step out of itself, or leap forward, or turn back, or pause in its movement. These things it can not do; but precisely these things men discover that through their wisdom they can do. Their thought is not, like the process of life, necessitated; it has not to move inexorably forward; it can range where it will, irresponsibly into the past or the future; it can pick out and detain a moment, and examine it for a lifetime; it can make all sorts of suns to stand still; it can anchor men, irrespective of the imperative needs of life, to the distant past; it can make him halt, for the sake of stability, at a dangerous stage, a perilous crossing; it can be great, sublime, meaningless or unnatural, abysmally and fundamentally. It can rob life of meaning simply by giving it a meaning. It can do this, because it is in some sense detached from life, free and therefore irresponsible. And being this, it is a dangerous thing; but this only the wisest see. Wisdom, they see, is not a solution merely, but a problem. There is something to be said against it!

The wisdom which can thus discover itself from life has an aim; an aim which, if man

acknowledges wisdom at all, he must acknowledge to be wise. This aim is the attainment of stability. In nature man finds only ceaseless change, and he seeks to create in the bosom of change a stability of his own. In thought he makes things changeless and eternal; in practical life he establishes settled beliefs, settled laws. This affirmation of stability expressed itself early in Europe; ideally in Parmenides and Plato, and politically in the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. But the stability which wisdom seeks is the stability of changelessness; not the stability of life itself, for life is stable just because it is change. The thing which would infallibly destroy its stability would be—stability as the wise know it. There is no escape from this law. In life everything, even rest, is motion.

The antagonism between wisdom and life is here, then, complete. If it were powerful enough wisdom would destroy all life, simply and effectively, by stopping everything that moves, that it might be studied in security. It would do this if it could, for wisdom is like everything else—finally without conscience.

But wisdom is necessary; if it is the enemy of life, it is a necessary enemy, and it serves life in combating it. Here, then, is the criterion of wisdom: in as far as it does this, it is good, for its

very denial affirms; in as far as it does more than this, it is evil, for its denial is mere denial. "A *little* reason, to be sure," said Nietzsche, "a germ of wisdom scattered from star to star—this heaven is so mixed in all things; for the sake of folly, wisdom is mixed in all things!"

So it is folly, great folly, which finally judges the wisdom of men; folly, the abysmal and irreducible folly which is itself the unconscious wisdom of existence. All conscious wisdom is judged, is weighed and approved or denied, in being, by unconscious wisdom. A people carves itself with heroic prohibitions and cruel punishments into a nation which becomes as hard and unconquerable as granite, lasting for a thousand years; but the time comes when the great folly, the great wisdom, sweeps it away because its folly and wisdom are not those of life. A Man-God lays down once and for all what Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Love are, and founds a Church in which all men for ever shall worship; but when the time comes the Church stands empty, the Word is void, and their very wisdom makes them appear more desolate. The wise search for the flaw which has brought their work to nothing. But the flaw is not a flaw of reason; it is not wisdom but something else that is lacking. The *unconscious* wisdom of life judges not only our crimes; it condemns our most precious and holy things—

virtue, self-sacrifice, beauty, truth—because they want to be final and are not.

But because this thing is his judge and brings his work to nothing, man has given it the blackest of names; it is "the world" of the Christians, the "nature red in tooth and claw" of last century; it is remorseless Time, blind Chance, the Devil himself. Yes, this is Mephistopheles, the spirit of denial, the being which willing evil does good; and Faust, in affirming him, in drawing from him power and life, put himself above formal wisdom, and explored for the first time a wisdom beyond wisdom, the reconciling gnosis which we all in our time desire. To-day we desire to be Fausts, and, moreover, we no longer regard Mephistopheles as evil; for we know why men once thought him evil. They could not do otherwise. Their wisdom by its very constitution was a "no" to life; and life when it overthrew the works of their wisdom had therefore to be denied. But this denial no longer satisfies us. We desire to possess a wisdom which does not merely deny, but which transcends its denial; which not only creates the antithesis, thought and life, but also reconciles them; a wisdom not merely conscious, a form finally empty and void, but a wisdom both conscious and unconscious, fundamental, integral, the affirmation not in words merely, but in being, of all existence, the one and



only real affirmation. This is what Nietzsche called Dionysian wisdom; and for this our age is ripe.

This unconscious wisdom, the judge of nations and of men, is not a metaphor. It is not something senseless which the poet man has endowed with meaning. It is not Chance, oblivious Time, or anything else of which moralists and rhetoricians love to speak. It is the law by which existence itself exists; it is that without which nothing could have been. For the rest, if that is necessary, it is scientifically demonstrable. Writers on psycho-analysis have shown us how much wiser we are than we think; they have begun to reveal the unconscious, a thing compared with which our consciousness is obvious, shallow, solemn, insincere; a thing so infinitely subtle that it perceives even the imperceptible, so undeviatingly just that it does not ignore or conceal what wounds itself; a thing pitiless, caring nothing for us, willing, if we do not conform with its needs, to slay us, to drive us mad; a thing great, and salutary, which if we recognize it will make us more than gods. This wisdom is not deceived by eternal truths, good and evil, and all the meanness, the glory and the pride of the intellect. It can do only two things, condemn or reconcile, because only these two things can finally be done.

What does not altogether affirm life it must destroy.

This is the thing which in our time we have come to affirm. How far this affirmation will take us, we do not know; and therefore we can not realize its greatness. But in a hundred years, perhaps, people will apprehend its meaning; and then they will speak of it as a turning-point in the fate of the human spirit.

## XVIII

### AGAINST OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

ALL controversies, even mankind's immemorial ones, become old; and then we debaters are like graybeards, fighting over the battles of our youth, sometimes the battles of our grandfathers' youth, not realizing that the world has rolled into a new millennium. But as they are more and more divorced from life, our disputes become more simple and defined; every one, the small as well as the great, takes part in them; and the whole world is arrayed, more clearly than even a believer in the class-war could imagine, in two factions. Then there is only one course left; one must be against both sides. To anyone who wants to become real—for we are all born last century's ghosts—it is not enough to-day, when all arguments sound hollow, and especially to those who use them, to be "in the right": one must deny the very assumptions upon which the arguments of "the right" as well as the wrong are founded, for the sake of life, which these assumptions imprison and poison. One must be not merely

against wrong issues, one must be against all issues; this drastic, perhaps dangerous denial is needed if we are to affirm everything else. We must deny the meanings which men have given to life so that life itself shall have a meaning.

The time has passed when reality can be entertained in the disguise of an issue. What is it that men call an issue? It is to make a tragic problem (for all problems are tragic) so small and so empty that everybody can understand it. Everybody must understand it, for everybody must take sides: this is really the important thing; man is a creature with a mania for being either among the sheep or the goats, and it is this longing which he desires to satisfy, and by no means his longing to comprehend existence. It does not really matter, fundamentally, to men that they are not discussing realities; they are discussing, and that is enough. So they falsify life radically to make possible an attitude for everybody; and then they live this falsification, which is their life. Men's arguments do not matter at all, therefore; they neither injure nor save anything: the dangerous thing is always the primal assumption upon which they rest. There only one finds something real, even if wrong; and the philosopher must question this, and this only. He can not recognize the issues which men discuss, for in them he discovers no longer the shape

of a living reality: they are not his issues. If he sets himself in the lists prepared for him, he binds himself willingly in small lies, and puts out his eyes with his own fingers.

Yet this is the convention under which all things are conceived: everything is an issue, everything is made small, even the problem of existence itself. The question of life has become this: whether happiness can be attained or not—and in the end every man feels that he would not have this happiness even if it came to him of itself. Yet he desires happiness, but not after it has passed through the argument-mill.

The falsification in this dispute is so naïve that it is scarcely interesting: yet, seeing that we do not seek happiness, let us examine it. First, then, there is a living truth: that man desires happiness. "Well," says the optimist, "happiness is possible. Let us therefore define happiness; and then let us 'pursue' it. But as I want you all to help me, you must all agree with me in my definition of happiness. That is not difficult: I must discover what you all believe happiness to be; and what you all regard as happiness is the right to do what you like. Very well, then: agreed. But now, propelled from behind by reason, I must take another step. It is not I merely, alas, who have the right to do what I like, but all men. There-

fore I must exercise my freedom only in so far as in doing so I do not prevent anyone else from doing the same. In short, I must do what I do not like—in fact, every one must do what he does not like—in order that all may have the infinite satisfaction of doing what they like.” But the “all,” alas, no longer exists: the very goal which the optimist set out to reach seems, in his attainment of it, to have disappeared. Happiness has vanished; but never mind, there is still “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” That must therefore be happiness itself, seeing that our argument has carried us to it. Moreover, this it is possible to attain; so man can indeed be happy.

The refutation of this happiness is that man does not want it. This is not the goal which he set out with such great longing to reach. Rather than rest in this, he would endure every pain, suffer every calamity, even utterly extinguish his being, so that he might realize to its last pang the terrible urgency of life within him, waiting to be discharged. In his heart he would prefer this; for this would be in some sense realization, and “the happiness of the greatest number” is attained only in the defeat of realization. The rationalization of happiness is only a deception, by which the optimist forces upon man something which he does not want. The triumph of optimism is pos-

sible. That is just what man fears most; and his optimism would be to believe with the pessimists that it is not possible.

This is our paradox, that the goals which we set before us we do not desire. We bend all our energy to realize something, yet we do not wish to realize it. Our beliefs and our desires are at war; and what the one accomplishes the other destroys. When equilibrium and stability—that stability which, it seems to us, we long for so strongly—have been realized, then we discover only their meanness. We see our great longing satisfied, and our satisfaction is paltry. Then come disillusionment and despair. This seems to be all that life has to give; for if attainment itself is hollow, what else can there be which is real? Our very successes seem to make existence more meaningless; we are ashamed of the shabby scrap of happiness that we have suffered pain in conquering. We have set the goal for life, we have attained it, and it is insignificant: therefore life itself must be insignificant. Progress is something which defeats itself fatally when it succeeds; its victories bring only disgust, and out of that disgust comes the violence of desperation, the despair of men when they discover that they can not rest in the most comfortable beds, even when they have specially prepared



them. Optimism has only to be consummated to create pessimism.

What is it that deceives men so openly that in laboring for insignificant goals they think they are consummating their freedom? What is it that makes common and small their longing for an existence of freedom and ecstasy? It is a logical reason, that optimistic, persuasive, utilitarian reason, which can so fatally make everything mean. Our wisdom deceives us more to-day than folly itself. It is not only insufficient for us; it is destructive, negative. It is at enmity with life, for it seeks only one thing, stability for the sake of safety. Even when it thinks it "pursues" freedom, it is only pursuing safety.

In it there is no redemption: we need a new wisdom, a wisdom without prudence, hardy; beyond the calculation of optimism and pessimism, too careless, indeed, for it; too frivolous and too serious to take progress seriously; incapable of thinking in terms of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Its great distinction will be precisely an incapacity to do what the old wisdom has done. It will not disprove the old wisdom: it will simply be beyond it. It will not, for instance, refute progress: that would be unintelligent, for progress refutes itself. Let progress go on, it will say, but do not be swindled by it.

Do not be deceived by anyone who tells you that necessity can be abolished; and do not even desire that it should be abolished, for if it did not exist how could your freedom exist? What would your freedom be without something against which to strive and to triumph? A "state," a concept, a neutral thing, almost as bad as heaven. Express yourself, then; attain and maintain your freedom—and take the consequences; on no account escape them, for in doing that you are once more deceived, and you will once more be disillusioned. For it is not what you experience, but what you do not experience that brings disillusionment. Assert yourself to the utmost; there is no other wisdom, no other knowledge, no other life, nothing else which you may experience and possess in the world; if this passes you by then all has passed you by.

The great error of our old wisdom was this: that it set in the future only happiness, harmony, stability; and this is the last Philistinism of which man is capable, whatever fine names he may give it. For man will not be satisfied with mere harmony: he desires discord as well. He desires everything: happiness and pain, harmony and discord, chance and issue. It was the distinction of Sorel that, in his adumbration of the future, he recognized this. He swept away the future of attainment and set in its place a great catas-

trophe, the myth of the General Strike, and over the edge of that unresolved event he would not look. That is the last word which our wisdom, disillusioned by Utopias, has said. We are no longer in a time when we can think that freedom and happiness can be possessed by arrangement; we know they must be fought for: for the fight for them, too, is part of freedom, part of the happiness which men desire. Yet every aim of man is not on that account annulled; for man finds his aim, realizes himself anew, in this new life, this new acceptance of life. To sweep away from the world at any rate the last trace of "heaven"; to reject the ideal of an earthly paradise, to choose, instead of Utopia, life, is itself to attain something which has never yet been attained.

## XIX

### AGAINST BEING CONVINCED

ONE of the worst effects of the philosophical belief in the Absolute has not been noted perhaps as definitely as it might have been had students of philosophy been psychologists, or psychologists students of philosophy. The belief that reason is absolute has encouraged men to pass their lives without intermittance in thought; to transform themselves into minds which can do nothing but reason, and, worse still, which can not cease to reason and lapse into their natural vacancy. The philosopher is a man who thinks in and out of season; and this is sufficient cause why to popular eyes he should appear to be in a sense unnatural, even monstrous, for the monstrous is simply what does not observe its proper time, and above all, therefore, what is timeless. Now, if we could imagine the very opposite of this philosopher! He would be a thinker whose characteristic attribute, so unusual in this context as to appear paradoxical, would be an incredible simplicity, a spontaneity which would appear to be a piece of nature's carelessness. The "problems" of phi-

losophy would not exist for him. He would affirm, without thinking, the antitheses of all philosophical truths. It would seem to him a truism that whatever lives unchanged in all seasons has no season; and he would have enough of the wisdom of nature to know that without its season there can be no fruit. He would not be, like other philosophers, a man who makes it a point of honour to think at all times; philosophy would be to him the autumn of his spiritual year, an autumn in which all the unquiet growth and acrid green heaviness of the summer would dissolve and breathe itself out, becoming painless and lovely, and leaving him free. His thoughts would fall down, light and cold, but stored with the memory of a hundred suns. Philosophy would be to him a moment of involuntary light-heartedness, of golden sterility and emptiness, an escape from all the earnestness and solemnity of the passions.

There is about this process so little thoroughness, so little morality, that it must appear outrageous to all thinkers; but then, there may be no reason at all why thought should be either thorough or moral. The modern habit of sincerity, taken over from science, the attitude of serious, unsophisticated "acceptance" and inquiry, makes an assumption so naïve that one can refuse with a good conscience to believe in it; the assumption, namely: that life is as sincere as the

questioner, and that she will give a serious answer to a serious question. There exist wayward and profound beings, and life may be like these, who become more wayward when the earnest soul interrogates them "in good faith"; they know he unconsciously tries to seduce them into a sincerity like his own, and they deceive him in sheer self-defense. Good nature and honesty, in spite of their apparent disinterestedness, are insidious qualities; if a man possesses them he thinks he is entitled to demand them in return from every one and everything else, even from nature. We are sincere, in the end, as a sort of invitation to other people to be sincere. But what if nature should not acknowledge the validity of sincerity at all?

If a man speaks impressively, he speaks the truth: that is a conclusion drawn more frequently than we imagine. And that is natural, for every man who discovers a truth immediately acquires a shade of solemnity. The priests who, whatever their virtues, sin enough to have a little knowledge of psychology, know that it is never their truths but their seriousness which convinces the masses. In consequence—it is a piece of worldly wisdom which deserves the highest admiration—they have exalted seriousness if not to an art, to a technique, by means of which they can be more apocalyptically and successfully serious than any other human organization. If we look

too carefully into the attitude of seriousness, we will find, it is true, a small stupidity and a big hypocrisy; for when a man is solemn he is nine times out of ten unconsciously trying to persuade himself that he is much nearer to the truth than he is in reality, so near the truth, in fact, that he is a little dazzled, a little confused, and does not know what he believes or what he sees. There is, of course, no insincerity involved in being in that state; but, quite simply, one should not disguise it as seriousness and virtue. Anyone would not if one did not unconsciously desire by means of it to enhance one's power.

To free oneself from the bondage of the seriousness of others, and also from one's own, frivolity is necessary; and certain truths can not be known unless we are frivolous enough to conceive them. All philosophers, except perhaps the English and the German, have a vein of frivolity, a detachment pushed to carelessness, which permits, or, rather, enables them—for it is an attainment—to discuss the greatest matters, God, Immortality, though perhaps not the Absolute (their *amour-propre* is too deeply involved there), entirely without preference, and as if the issue did not matter: the name given to this rare mood is intellectuality. There is a moment of freedom sometimes vouchsafed the intellect, when its movement is mere play, and when it exercises



itself for its pleasure and to enjoy its own suppleness and strength. That has been thus far the highest moment of philosophy, in which all its seriousness and yearning have dissolved into mere laughter and paradox.

But that, of course, is not the moment of philosophy which is "trusted" even by philosophers. There seems to be a disposition among philosophers—and among men—not to accept any truth which is not forced upon them. But how much there is to be distrusted in this disposition and the truths which it admits! The searcher for the truth thinks that if he uses the following method he will be successful. He brings before him the question, "What is truth?" and he considers the answers one after another, rejecting them all until there is only one left; this he accepts because there is no other hypothesis. Now, what is one to think of this? Are we entitled to trust a man so unresourceful, so dull, and so well-meaning? Are we justified in crediting him with sufficient judgment even to reject errors? In the end we can only say to him, "Yes, you have worked yourself into a position in which you have no choice but to surrender to an imperative truth. But that does not mean that it is *the* truth: it only means that you can go no further. Perhaps some one else——?" But a philosopher who has labored so badly as to land himself in a *cul-de-sac*

will never be convinced that the truth is not in it along with him.

It is a sign of the constancy of human hypocrisy that in speaking the truth, the one subject demanding rigid sincerity, men deceive themselves as sentimentally as they do in speaking of anything else. For example, they will not admit that it is as important to them that they should like a truth as that a truth should be true. Yet it is, of course, the case; and there is in the unconditional praise of truth something intellectually indecent; for what, in the first place, has the truth to do with rhetoric, and whither, in the second, has the self-knowledge of the philosopher flown when he asserts that he loves all truth? "Truth though the heavens fall" is a piece of mere sublimity; and all that a philosopher who knows himself would dare to say, and then he would think twice and smile, and perhaps not say it after all, would be "My truth though the heavens fall." But these attitudes are not even idle; they are ridiculous and uninteresting at the same time.

The slavery which men of thought impose upon themselves—they would like to believe that it is tragic, but it is not even tragi-comic—is such as only a paradoxical, and therefore a foolish, a clever and therefore a stupid, animal could imagine or achieve. What is it, this tragedy of

thought, with which so many modern memoirs and philosophies ring? It is something which as a matter of living, as an elementary exercise in *savoir faire*, is foolish. A man insists upon carrying on his shoulders a thought which is too heavy for him, which is not to his taste, and which irks him at every turn. Or, almost as disastrously, he lives habitually with a household of truths with whom he is not really on speaking terms. This spiritual lackey, who, possessing no truth, surrounds himself with truths out of a desire to be intellectually furnished, but eventually finds that he can not use them, and that they exhaust him, is, one almost dares to say, the flower of modern culture. It tires one, this roomful of awkward truths; it even disillusion one, so that one can not regard the labor of culture as a spiritual tragedy. Perhaps by means of it one acquires merit, but only those who can desire nothing else desire anything so meritorious as merit. The wisest plan with a truth which is not to one's taste is not to hold it. There is no reason why one personally should hold to all the truths that are known, and there are many reasons why one should not.

Before truth, as before everything else, one should be on guard against the traditional failing of man: to fall down incontinently in worship. To anyone who values his freedom, his grace

of intellectual movement, for that is the end of freedom in thought, a truth does not become good because it has behind it all the authority of logic and forces itself upon the mind: on the contrary, that is the strongest argument against it. All the truths which a man holds should be refutable; and he should be able, above all, to refute them himself, in order to escape from them when he pleases. We return for ever only to the thoughts from which we can take a holiday of a lifetime. This is what makes doubt the highest of the intellectual virtues. I do not mean "honest doubt"; there is no particular virtue in that; dishonest doubt is just as serviceable. But without doubt we could never escape either from truth or from ourselves, and life is unphilosophical to the extent that it is an eternal escape.

Dialectic is the great instrument of intellectual tyranny; and that is the last argument against it: logic, as Nietzsche observed, is essentially nihilistic. Yet, by the righteousness of its methods it has acquired a respectable reputation, which works in the most potent and unexpected ways for its sovereignty. For example, it is now accounted so honorable that when a man begins to argue we immediately begin to believe in him. Yet we should, of course, be more than usually shy; for his need to employ argument implies two things, that the truth which he seeks to establish

is not obviously true, and that he wishes to force us to believe it. Our faith in dialectic arises partly from our belief that no one will try by means of logic to prove anything if he can not do it, and partly from our desire to believe in something or other, this or that; and this will serve. For such reasons, and not for the reasons adduced by the dialectician, we are convinced in the most difficult and knotty controversies. We trust most of all the man who lures us into beliefs which we do not foresee, who, like Socrates, bids us follow "wheresoever our inquiry will take us": and that is bad psychology, for there is something which ordains what the direction shall be, the desires of the dialectician himself. Let us be honest. We should only trust the man who sets down his thoughts a little disconnectedly, and leaves them to speak for themselves; to shine, if they have life in them, and if they have not, to remain obscure.

All reason leads finally to folly; there is no final reason, for reason is not final. Any theory of logic, to be valid, must therefore be born outside of logic; and as whatever is outside logic is irrational, the critic of reason must be folly. We need a theory of thought from the standpoint of folly even if it be only to set thought free; for thought, as every modern philosophy proclaims, discovers in the end, alas, nothing but thought.

A theory of thought from the standpoint of folly, however, is still too difficult for us; we are too wise; and all that one can do is to set down a few guesses, as wild as possible, at the laughing philosopher. In doing so, one is on such improbable ground that one can be unconditionally idle and unconditionally serious. Well, let us imagine what will be the qualities of a thinker of this kind. The "questions" of philosophy will not exist for him; and in all questions therefore he will be against both sides. He will not run after truths, and when he has caught one, use it as a staff, even if it is fashioned in the convenient shape of a cross; on the contrary, he will try to escape from the truths which come to him, and only if he can not shake them off accept them as his own. He will try not to speak the truth, so that the truth may the more clearly speak out of him; for he will not trust unconditionally anything that is self-conscious, but only what is unconscious of itself. He will not strive to be profound, but to escape from his own profundity and to remain on the surface, knowing that it is the duty of everything to attain its form, its peculiar beauty. He will love time more than eternity, for eternity will appear to him to be only time plus monotony. But one must stop. Still, who will deny that such a man, if he were possible, would be our judge and deliverer?

## XX

### BEYOND THE ABSOLUTE

IN the search for the Absolute, this is what, seen by relativist eyes, always seems to happen. A philosopher finds himself confronted by a certain question, generally about the universe, perhaps a few hundred times; he can not escape from it, do what he will; he is compelled in the end for his own peace to find an answer. Now, in answering this question, is he more concerned for the truth of the answer or for the reconquest of his peace of mind? This is the question which should be put over the gateway to every philosophical system. It is not that one doubts the "good faith" of philosophers; one merely wonders whether in constructing a system to embrace the universe they are not simply deceiving themselves about a private spiritual irritation of their own. Our discipline in psychology, the fact that all of us have read a few hundred psychological novels, entitles us nowadays to ask this question without any appearance of malice, in fact, as the most natural inquiry in the world. We have long ceased to regard self-questioning as an honest



process, as straightforward as a Platonic dialogue; we no longer believe that one should trust oneself so far as to answer one's own questions; one only believes the answers of men whom one does not know, and even then one only "believes" them.

To return to philosophy; it is really nothing else than a piece of self-questioning answered by the questioner; and the answer is always an oblique one. Every philosophical problem has thus far been settled by solving another. The metaphysician begins by asking what is the nature of existence, but he always finishes by stating what is the nature of thought. This is not the slander of an enemy of philosophy; it is the confession of philosophy itself. In the end, Lachelier, the most profound mind which France produced in the last century, exclaimed triumphantly—why triumphantly?—in the end, after spanning and plumbing the whole universe of existence, thought discovers—only thought. We need not stop to consider Lachelier's deduction from this discovery—that thought must therefore be the only reality—it is more to the purpose to inquire why every philosopher who asks what life is should always reply to himself by saying what thought is. It is because by doing so he can attain peace of mind. He can give an answer with certainty—certainty at least by definition—to the

question "what is thought?" but he can give no certain answer to the question "what is life?" Therefore, he answers the former, and pretends, or even perhaps believes, that he has answered the latter. The deception here is so naïve and yet so profound, it is on such a great—such a ridiculous—scale, that one is surprised that no novelist has ever taken it as a theme. But every philosophy is itself nothing more than a piece of psychological fiction; Plato was only a Dostoyevsky whose problems had never become personal problems.

The result of this colossal piece of deception is that there has never yet been a philosophical answer to the question, "Has existence ultimately a meaning or is it ultimately without meaning?" It is true, every philosophy has taken this as its starting-point, but it has always deviated from the path as early as possible. The vice, or perhaps—who knows?—the virtue, at any rate, the characteristic, of metaphysics is simply this: that it has never been concerned with the Ultimate, but only with the Absolute. It has not tried to find the bounds of existence, but only the bounds of thought. It has pushed logic out into space, and tried to fill infinity with reasons and reasons and reasons.

The irrationality of this procedure is so clear, and the earnestness, half-longing, half-dutiful,

with which the philosophers have pursued it, is so much like unconscious desperation, that it startles anyone who is not a philosopher. All the paradoxes of philosophy, and especially all its contradictions, arise out of the profundity of its desires and not out of the subtlety or the clumsiness of its thought. Philosophy wishes to cast into the bottomless gulf of infinity a reason which shall be final; but at the same time it knows that reason is not final. Nevertheless it does not want to acknowledge this; and so it occupies itself constantly with intermediate reasons leading to finality, so that the final reason can only be seen in the distance, or, if it is brought near, is veiled in terms so sacred or so terrible that no one will dare to advance and to look behind it. With this profound and contradictory desire—to find reason in everything, a final reason, and yet a reason which does not cancel the possibility of reason beyond it—philosophy can not live in peace; it has to find a resolution, a “synthesis.” It has discovered, happily for itself, the concept of a finality not fixed but attained at every moment, a finality not altogether final, however, seeing that it evolves, a finality which, in fact, is simply our old friend Becoming with a serious expression. This discovery has been of great use to philosophers: it has given a good conscience to the desire—distrusted by old-fashioned meta-

physicians—to put one final concept behind another, and to find even in the most absolute meaning a meaning behind it, and again a meaning, and once more a meaning. It has given philosophy as well—and that has been all to the good—the justification for destroying its whole ancestry: this is now development. Philosophy has become in our time merely the process of the destruction of error, or rather of its own errors: the long-drawn, or, if one may be philosophical, the eternal suicide, hidden under a deceitful veil of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, of philosophy itself.

After being drawn so far into the philosophical deeps, let us hasten to the shallows again, and regard the side of philosophy which men—and philosophy itself—never see, its surface. Even wisdom can not regard itself; like everything else it is blind on its blind side. To see philosophy properly one must possess folly.

There is one conclusion in which both reason and folly agree: that there can not be a final reason. When one has discovered the meaning of anything—of the universe, for example—there can not be another meaning in this meaning, and another again in that. Every meaning is itself without meaning; and beyond it lies always—meaninglessness. Behind all the goals which men have set for themselves and the universe there

is no reason. Men have called existence rational because the worlds go on for millions of years doing the same thing, or because the seasons return punctually, or even because, if one sows a few nasturtium seeds, nasturtiums do, undoubtedly, at the appointed time appear. But this only shows that there is a method by which, the universe happening to exist, it can contrive to exist: but why it should exist at all is another question. A more rash and simple set of philosophers reply: the universe is not a mere circle of necessity closed in upon itself; it exists for a Purpose which the stars and God and men work out, strictly according to plan. But one can still inquire why the design and the universe fashioned according to it should exist. What *reason* had it to come into being? At the other side of the last, most universal meaning, lies folly.

The most satisfying and profound account of the creation of the world is given in the book of Genesis: we are told that God made the world, for no reason that is mentioned, but apparently as an arbitrary act, perhaps out of whim. The economy of that account—what it avoids saying—is a triumph of subtlety, which the theologians and the scientists have since blunted by adding “interpretations” to it (its skill in avoiding an interpretation is precisely its point). The world arose out of chaos; or, translated into modern

language, the world rose out of the irrational: that is "all we know on earth, and all we need to know."

It is a matter for surprise or not, according to one's temperament and tradition, why men should so constantly run away, or appear to run away, from the acknowledgment of the ultimate irrationality of the world. They run away because they are philosophers, because they are normal, because they desire comfort, or stability, or even Truth, because they wish Nature at least to think of them, to "evolve" towards them, even if it does not love them—in short, for a thousand reasons, and a thousand instincts parading as reasons. They want to make infinity moral—indeed, a place very like Boston—because the possession of morality by others, even by other planets, renders one's own life more pleasant. Therefore, for all these reasons, and because the belief that two and two make four is the most comforting that has ever been discovered, men honor philosophy as a sort of morality for the stars, and perhaps for God too. They praise philosophy for its ethics; a perfectly just appraisal, as we have seen.

Yet things occasionally happen so strange and contradictory that they make one wonder whether after all man desires eternal reason or eternal folly. Who can explain the profound satisfac-

tion which men feel in contemplating ruins? It is certainly strange that they should be most pleased when they see their greatest prudence and forethought brought to nothing by the heartlessness of time. Perhaps it is that in gazing at ruins they are relieved from the terrible burden of human wisdom; they realize that reason can never triumph absolutely, and that there will always remain an escape from it—in folly. If this is so, they do not know it; they imagine that their feelings are explained when they give them the title of “melancholy” (but melancholy is at bottom a sensation of pleasure). They do not realize that they are happy because folly has triumphed over wisdom. They imagine, on the contrary, that they are sad because meaning has been made meaningless, and prudence has been defeated. But this is the necessary piece of folly in all wisdom, that it persuades man to seek for something which he does not want, and even enables him to attain it.

There exist in all times a few tactfully compounded natures who without intellectual travail remain skeptical of the superiority of wisdom over folly, and with instinctive detachment refrain from pursuing either. To them the proper response to an unanswerable argument is a jest: they know there is ultimately no other. The economy in coming to a conclusion such as this without going



through the chain of arguments which leads to it is what characterizes a man of this kind, and what he prizes most. He is always escaping; and he values folly and wisdom as means of escape from each other: he avoids solely what lies between, the subtle province of argument, from which it is so difficult to free oneself. Unfortunately, this kind of man is almost always inarticulate; he does not set down his conclusions, because these, too, are things from which he is always trying to run away.

As a means of escape from all sorts of things, and especially from the insoluble, laughter is perhaps the most notable contrivance that man has ever fashioned. M. Bergson, in his very professorial book, "*Le Rire*," tries to show that we laugh because it is our duty; and that there is a moral in every guffaw. Laughter, he says, exists to castigate extravagances, or faults, or even the smaller vices. One wonders at the ease with which a philosopher's taste can be degraded by an excessive moral bias; for surely one observes the proprieties of humor more in saying that every extravagance, fault and vice is justified if it is crowned with laughter. But laughter is in reality something quite different from what M. Bergson imagines it to be. In it one escapes from anything and everything, even from reason: that is its profundity. Laughter can refute even

the truth: and existence would really be unbearable—we feel this, we do not yet know it—if the truth were quite irrefutable. Life itself is “eternal” denial of Truth, “eternal” destruction of all that wisdom has contrived. And—in our hearts we would have it so.

## XXI

### ON THE UNIVERSE

THERE is hardly a single thing which can be said by us, in the present age, upon the universe. On this subject our assurance has been steadily diminishing in the last hundred years; we have, with every advance in knowledge, discovered that we know less and less about it, and now we are not sure even that we can call it a universe. We would be ashamed to claim to know as much about it as Hegel did a century ago. This is not because we are more honest than Hegel; or because science has raised so many questions since he settled them; it is because our attitude in respect to everything has changed. We no longer desire with the naïve rationality of all the centuries which have preceded ours a universe so self-evident and so workmanlike as theirs. We want a little chaos in our order; we are no longer lugubrious and apocalyptic over evidence which shakes a Design; on the contrary, we are pleased, as if in some way a little part of a wearisome burden had been lifted from our spirit. We have been carrying the universe too long on our

backs, this metaphysical universe which has become so much heavier than chaos itself. Our desire to escape from it is a desire to escape into another universe.

Earlier generations created the metaphysical universe: we desire to abolish it. The old universe has lasted for more than four thousand years; we ourselves are rooted centuries deep in it; every voice to which we can listen, even our own, speaks out of it; only in relation to it is every great thought significant; all the unconscious power of our heredity perpetuates it in us, like a memory from which we can not escape and do not desire to escape. The voice of every god and every siren chains us in it. Yet we can not remain. The old truth and the old beauty have lost their savor. The world as men have known it has suffered the most tremendous loss it could suffer: it has lost its meaning. It is no longer, as it once was, the condition of their freedom, but of their bondage.

To discover in the universe law and reason, was once the highest achievement of man; the one which aroused the greatest admiration and gratitude; for then a world without law was the human commonplace. In that world the inexplicable and the arbitrary were the rule, the simplest events were experienced as something terrific and unknowable, and man lived in the

midst of terrors. The discovery of law was after this an almost unbelievable stroke of luck, an incredible deliverance from every sort of fear. It was the first step which man made towards freedom, for in giving nature laws he put himself on an equality with it, as something which might be expected to behave in a certain way. Now it is this universe in which we still live. Around it all our conceptions, our systems of thought and of religion, and our customary prejudices from the smallest to the greatest have been built. Our thoughts—one would almost dare to say our lives—have relevance only to this universe. There is not a single conscious act of ours which is not oriented with reference to it. But this orientation, which was once ready, enthusiastic, almost a crusade, is now so will-less that we might call it automatic, and the universe as we know it is therefore the greatest source of melancholy to man, and the sign of his servitude, for now all his actions are performed in view of something which he does not love, and which wearies him. It is not one thing or two which awakens disgust and weariness in us: it is the universe.

Man escaped from the first arbitrary, formless universe into a reasonable one, which was a greater one because it was the correlative of a higher vitality, a vitality which could organize. The vocabulary for this new universe existed in

the words which men gave to their perceptions: all that was needed was a syntax, the power of using these perceptions as conceptions. Beyond this we have not yet gone. We have learned thus far the grammar of our universe; but we can not use language freely: we can not escape from our consciousness of grammar so completely that we can handle our universe beautifully as poets and artists. Or, to take another simile, we have disciplined ourselves far enough to escape from the utter chaos in movement of primitive man; and by hard training we have mastered the different steps by means of which existence dances. But we have not, after training our legs, emancipated them into free movement: we know all the steps but we can not dance. We have achieved regularity, but it has not become light and assured, so that we may indulge, as a sort of luxury of vitality, in subtle violations of it. We can not achieve that regularity through irregularity, which is the mark of all divine things. When we think of the universe we can not allow ourselves the freedom of every nuance and every exception; and we are condemned, in everything which concerns it, to a certain stiff awkwardness.

To raise order out of chaos was a sign of vitality, but the complete achievement of the highest vitality is shown when we put all organization

beneath us, and use it easily and gracefully as if in play. Play is the final form of vitality. We can not return to the mere chaos of the first universe, for that would be for us annihilation. We can not rest in the merely reasonable universe which we know; and there is no choice for us but to strive to reinstate in the universe and in our souls the exceptional, the unexpected, the unratified, and whatever makes rhythm interesting and spiritual. For this we are in need of revising a thousand of our conceptions; for instance, development and progress. These, as we know them at present, are mere expedients to make the world appear reasonable. We *invent* steady processes, but evolution takes leaps; a fact which does not prevent the scientist from continuing to call the affair evolution. But I can only skim over that abyss. Progress is a thing of which we know a little more, although we know very little even about that. But we know that great events have come as things unforeseen, unpredictable; in the common slang, miraculous. They have not been solutions to old problems. Solutions, indeed, are of little account for progress: they are only a part, the last part, of the problem. There are always problems in the world, and people who try to solve them: but only the routine of life is kept going in that way. A step ahead is made only by the man who, con-



fronted like other men by problems, does not work out the sum in the traditional way, but thinks of something else. We know this man only in one way, by the fact that he is not tied to necessity; and the solution which he brings for problems is not a response to need; it is the discovery of something new and superfluous, the creation of a new freedom, and therefore of a new problem, in which the old one suddenly finds itself nonexistent.

It would be worth the while of a witty philosopher to examine history as Hegel did, but from the opposite point of view; and to try to discover there how many instances there are of sudden, inexplicable happenings, of events which seem to come out of chaos itself, outside of reason and necessity. The astonishing figure of Jesus, to whom even Christians (perhaps Christians least of all) have after two thousand years not been able to reconcile themselves, so that they can really believe in him; the amazing rise of the Roman Catholic Church; the Renaissance: these have not been explained nor made reasonable; they have simply been fitted into the past. When they really happened and men had them before their eyes, they were seen as portents, crimes or follies. It is time which has made them rational; indeed, a thing needs only to have happened a hundred years ago to be logical. Scientific his-

torians are not sufficiently psychologists to see this, or to doubt that every event in history happened as the result of a "cause"—understanding cause in the severe and workable sense of a reasonable cause. But what the historian calls a cause is the particular piece of folly or of hardihood which started a train of events; and the reason for folly is too deep for any historian. He desires to make history rational; and juggles unconsciously with the word "cause" without knowing that he is begging the question, and even without knowing the question. It is notorious how stupid this has made history. It has given the world the Hegelian pedantry of holding that everything that is accomplished is moral; that is, without nuance, for every nuance is immoral; and without exceptions, for every exception is witty. The truth is that there can not be any explanation of progress, for progress is a matter of genius, and one can not have information about genius. One here uses one's imagination or one uses nothing; and the fault of every rationalized history is that it is thinkable, but it is not imaginable. Now imagination is the great individualizing faculty of the mind, as reason is the great organizing and leveling faculty.

Turning from history to the world, there is the "wastefulness" of nature, which philosophers

have regarded with such embarrassed eyes. We have reached the stage now at which it is pleasant to realize that nature is wasteful, and that it does everything, including life, on far too lavish a scale. At the same time the arbitrariness of the feelings and thoughts within themselves has become the chief preoccupation and the chief pleasure of artists. Dostoyevsky and Stendhal have made us realize the beauty and nobility of unaccountable, irrational impulses and actions. The nuance is alone worth while: the rule exists that it may be possible. So radically has our taste in this matter changed that after our discipline in modern psychological literature we find insipid, naïve and a little mean, the works of an earlier time in which reason is given an unconditional validity, and the riches of foible and waywardness are not even suspected. How to be a little out of step, how to escape from rhythm in order cunningly to return to it, is the concern of almost all modern art, whether it is called new or traditional. There is, in fact, at present no traditional art: no fundamental connection between Milton, Corneille, Molière, Fielding, Voltaire, and Stendhal, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche.

But the supreme expression of our desire to escape from the rational world is the modern obsession with the future. The future is the absolute expression of chaos. It is the eternally

strange sea, terrifying and seductive, into which we have step by step to advance, and into which we must at last fall headlong. Philosophies, religions and moralities have been invented for one purpose: to conceal the fact that we all walk on the sea, and move on the face of chaos. The paradox is that as soon as we have set our feet upon it it becomes dry land; but though we are planted on a small, solid rock we can look out only into chaos. That is the great seduction of contemplation. The future is the chief modern discovery, and it is also the key to our desire. We wish the universe to be more uncertain and more free. Leopardi proved that it is only the allurements of the future, the *desire* for chaos, which makes men wish to live. But he drew the wrong conclusions from this, when he used it to support his pessimism. It supports neither optimism nor pessimism: it is life, and it is becoming more and more the conscious and affirmed essence of life.

## XXII

### IMPRESSIONS OF PRAGUE—I

ON the Petrin Hill there is a small iron erection, two hundred feet or so in height, built in imitation of the Eiffel Tower. From the top of it one may see, on those clear days which come rarely to Prague, the environs of the town for twenty miles. The prospect, especially in autumn, is intensely dismal, and fills one with a sort of hard, acrid melancholy. As far as the horizon the air is filled with fine, impalpable dust, which casts, even on the sunniest days, a dirty shadow over the parched fields; fields which stretch in a hard, whitish plateau, almost shrubless, as far as the eye can reach. Here and there rises a solitary and decrepit line of trees; an abrupt scar of naked white rock raises itself at intervals out of the arid flatness; but these projections by their meanness only strengthen the impression of monotony and poverty. On the other side, the towers and spires of Prague surge up through the sea of dirty smoke which almost always hangs over them. One wishes impatiently to brush away the overhanging gloom, so that the town

might lie in clear light, unsheathing all its beauties to a single glance; and one descends sadly, overwhelmed by the impression of wasted plains and gloom-shot light.

But when one takes a walk over these crumbling fields, one discovers in a little while a new country full of greenness and delight. The landscape, which seems such an unbroken waste from the Petrin, is diversified by little hidden dells, by miniature, verdurous chasms, filled with the charms of nature. What one sees at a first glance from almost any point of vantage near Prague is the tops of the hills, and in this part of Bohemia one has not to ascend the heights but to go down into the valleys to discover the country-side. These gulleys generally descend without warning, abruptly and steeply, almost like cliffs. The houses, painted yellow, red and blue, climb up their sides until the sheer, jutting rock puts a boundary to them. Every available square foot of soil is laid out in terraces, and cultivated, and even in the glistening afternoon sun, sturdy old men and still more sturdy old women are industrious upon them. One climbs by a winding path to the hot upland where nothing but a goat or two can find sustenance, and once more the gulley is swallowed up in the unbroken contour of the plain.

The banks of the river are charming, and up to

the beginning of winter a fleet of excursion boats, small, efficient craft, carry all sorts of freightage to a distance of a few miles on either side of Prague; old women with an invariable basket full of mysterious, personal goods strapped on their backs; young *slecnas* returning to their summer villas from their music lessons in Prague; retired, gray-haired officials, with the pathetic air of that class, out for a solitary trip; fat and saturnine business men, who possess a country residence up the river simply as an outward sign of their membership in the bourgeoisie, and who sit apart wrapt in morose calculation; gendarmes going on unaccountable errands; and foreign tourists, full of curiosity and patronage, and venting their prejudices in all the languages of Europe. The old women, their bundles unstrapped and piled on the deck around them, gossip with that air of democratic fraternity which old women of the working class, of all human beings, seem most completely to possess; but as soon as the boat reaches their town they are already on the gangway, and immediately begin to trudge on their way, without looking back, as if their whole being were immovably fixed on a purpose of inconceivable importance. There are among them magnificent old women, cheerful and stalwart, broad-shouldered, carrying immense burdens with a careless air; decisive, ready and capable, with



the honor and freedom of poverty in all their words and gestures. They have a franker air than the old men, in whose faces there is often something cunning and mean. The women in Bohemia have more spirit than the men; they are more responsible and more independent, as it is said the Russian women are, and this is shown most clearly in their indomitable old age. The narrow canker of peasant life which in so many countries dehumanizes the peasantry, has left them as vigorous and interesting as old masks on which life has impressed almost everything that can be impressed; and on their faces is the beauty of adversities intrepidly borne. I have watched them often at the market-stalls and in the streets, and I have found nothing in Prague more beautiful.

Prague, like the country around it, reveals its beauty in detail rather than in general plan. There is, it is true, the romantic and unforgettable view from the Most Legii over the river to the Hrad, crowned with its cathedral, and surrounded by a confused sea of palaces and churches surging up to it out of the Mala Strana. The little hill itself has from a distance the appearance of a single piece of architecture daringly executed; the streets of palaces rise up like a chaotic but solid pyramid, and on the top is set, square and secure, the immense castle, while over

it soars, as the final crown of the edifice, the Cathedral of Saint Vituo. At all times it is beautiful; in the morning when through the sun-shot mist it hangs insubstantial over the river; in the afternoon when every line and shadow of it stands out clear and bare; and at night when it becomes a crouching shadow against the luminous sky. The memory of this vista is the memory which every one must carry away from Prague, the one aspect of the city in which there is at once intense beauty and spaciousness.

When one goes through the streets of the town itself, one is continually surprised by the lovely or quaint old houses, but the sense of spaciousness is gone. The streets are narrow, especially in the Stare Mesto (the Old Town), and in the Mala Strana, a huddle of old palaces and churches. The very squares are small, and palace is hidden behind palace in an overcrowding of opulence which makes a modern slum seem wide and airy. The Mala Strana is a sort of museum of palaces and churches, in which, however, there is no plan; where the costliest things are jumbled together as if they had been left lying about by a gigantic but careless collector of antiques. They are mostly in the baroque style, and it is to their advantage that the baroque, itself a too luxurious and overcrowded style, can stand this method of presentation perhaps better

than could any other. Outline is lost, for the palaces press in upon one another so closely that one can never get far enough away from them to seize them in a single glance. But when one has overcome a sense of irritation at the overhanging richness and confusion of the Mala Strana, these qualities become an additional charm, like the charm which decay adds to splendid buildings. From the narrow, steep lanes, mere trickles of cobble between towering precipices of masonry, cool, shadowy courts, filled with baskets, barrows and all sorts of rustic implements, open mysteriously. Here and there a fruit- or a *tabak*-stall appears inexplicably between the crumbling pillars of monastery. Indeed, these lanes are so packed with charm and surprise that one reaches the top of the hill very slowly. Once there, one looks down as from a cliff on the red roofs of the little town, and farther away over the smoke-draped towers of the Stare Mesto. The castle itself is a solid, spacious building containing about a thousand rooms, among which President Masaryk, when he took up his official residence there, found with difficulty, I have been told, one containing a bath. It is a charming comment on the aristocratic simplicity of his predecessors. I went inside the Cathedral of Saint Vituo, a small but fine example of Gothic architecture, but the luxuriance and speciousness of the gold and

jewelled ornamentation drove me quickly out again. Why the interiors of churches should be the most vulgar and tasteless places one can find in Christendom I have never been able to discover. The great materialistic heresy against art is expressed in them more blatantly than anywhere else: the heresy, namely, that richness or ostentation of material is more important than the form which spirit and imagination give to it. The "temporal arm" has certainly played a big part in the art as well as the history of the Catholic Church. One divines behind the jewels and gewgaws which hang awkwardly round the angular bodies of these overdressed saints an *arrière-pensée* which is displeasing. It is as though they were calculated to inspire in poor people a notion of the riches and power of the Church, and to do so by awakening all that is vulgar and covetous in their nature. I have no objection to being convinced by color and sound as well as by truth, and the Church is wise to use music and sculpture as well as the Word in making Christians; for by mere reason only part of us is convinced, and if we are to become whole creatures we must be convinced by art as well. But the color and sound which convince us must be beautiful color and sound. I have found beauty often in the exteriors of churches, but rarely within them. There could be no better excuse, if excuse

were needed, for remaining at an admiring distance.

At the foot of the hill, in a very unfortunate and inconspicuous position, lies the huge palace of the renowned Waldstein. It stretches along the full length of a street in which the municipal trams now run, and it is the most impressive and the dullest monument to pride which Prague contains. The great and enigmatical general caused twenty-eight private houses to be pulled down in order to make a foundation for it. The architecture is undistinguished, and only the chaotic immensity of the courts and salons remains to give one an impression of that contradictory and potent figure. Waldstein was a Bohemian, and considering the baffling part which he played in the Thirty Years' War, his unscrupulousness and magnanimity, his self-seeking and humanity, his treacheries in which there was always some fair appearance of justice, he is a thorny enigma to Czech writers. They would like to claim him as a great man and to repudiate him as an adventurer. Accordingly some historical investigators try to interpret him as a long-waiting but unsuccessful Czech patriot (he certainly had the notion of reëstablishing Bohemia as an independent nation—with himself as king); while others simply set him down as a man with an illimitable thirst

for power: the old Bohemian historian, Palacky, after standing motionless before his statue in Vienna, delivered himself suddenly of the brief verdict, "Blackguard!" Public offices are now snugly ensconced in remote corners of his great palace, and in such strange, modern terms his historical problem has been solved.

In an old square in the Stare Mesto is the house where Jan Hus lived during the years when he carried on the fight against the Roman Catholic Church and superstition which took him to Bâle and the stake. It is a homely, featureless building. Near it, in another square, used immemorially as a fruit-market, lived for a few months a man who by a very different and a still more glorious path came to a death as sad as that of Hus. Here, and in the neighboring suburb of Smichov, Mozart finished his "Don Giovanni," and saw its first production in the old Prague theatre. His house has still a cheerful, simple, eighteenth-century air; it looks out with gay inquisitiveness on the bustling movement, the laughter and intrigue of buying and selling, which that immortally happy spirit loved to watch. Yet it fills one with greater melancholy even than does the house of the first European reformer. Hus still lives in the radical, free-thinking temper of the Czechs, but Mozart could live

only once and die. He was an accident too marvelous to appear twice in a world of persecutors and persecuted; and it was surely by no chance that he died in misery.



## XXII (CONTINUED)

### IMPRESSIONS OF PRAGUE—2

WHEN one emerges from the Wilson station in Prague, with memories of Berlin still fresh in one's mind, one is immediately struck with the quietness of the town, the slowness of its *tempo*. The droshky takes one through deserted streets, pleasant and roomy in the dusty afternoon heat, and one suddenly crosses a main thoroughfare where electric cars rattle and clang and crowds jostle with the unceremonious determination of Continental peoples. But the flurry is on such a small scale and is so much more an affair of effervescence than of business necessity that one is not deceived for a moment. Prague is a country town, a big country town, dignified, even distinguished, but still a country town. From the moment one sets foot in it one would not think of calling it a metropolis—I do not know the exact meaning of metropolis, but I know that it fits Berlin exactly, and London better than any other word. A metropolis is essentially an artificial thing; it is strictly a town in the sense that it is the opposite of the country; there is no compro-

mise, no nuance in it; it is as indubitably Town as the Sahara is country. When large cities manage to retain an appearance of youthful freshness and grace it is because there is still a reminiscence of the country town in them. Now in Berlin there is not a trace of the country town; it is the most complete, self-conscious and awkward of all cities; one can not sit for five minutes even in "Unter den Linden" without discovering, to one's horror, that one is posing in ungainly moral attitudes. The very women can not be natural in that town. Such figures! Such dresses! In other parts of Germany, thank heavens, things are different. And in Prague, too, there is many a pretty *Fräulein* and many a *slecna* with dark and interesting Slavonic face.

I do not know what it is that makes a country town a country town. Perhaps it is something in the voices of the people, or something either too coarse or too polite in their manners; perhaps most of all the habit of copying other towns and of not standing firmly on one's own foundations. Prague is imitative. It attempts on the one hand Viennese effects, moral and fashionable, and on the other, traditional Slavonic effects, fallen into desuetude for several hundred years, but resurrected, it must be admitted, with rather a self-conscious air, now that Prague is the capital of a Slavonic Republic. Prague

imitates the present of other towns and its own past; its justification is that it does both with sincerity and grace, for the Czechs have a consummate talent for the adaptation and adroit handling of all sorts of foreign artistic material. They add some grace or other to every fashion they adopt. This gift is a dangerous one, for it inclines them to adopt rather than to create; and even then to adopt the things which are most alien to them and the most difficult to handle, so that the quickness and decisiveness of their wit may be the more brilliantly demonstrated.

Their endowments make them, of course, fine actors; and their theatre is not at all that of a country town—it owes very little to foreign fashions or contrivances. Here the Czechs are perfectly at home, audacious, original, full of surprises and delightful inventions. The people are enthusiastic for “the drama”; it is their great intellectual passion. The most stubborn Philistines, the fattest of the bourgeoisie, have a fine sense of what is good and bad in acting and in production. Heaven knows what use it is to them, or why they should have it; but there it is. They will sit through Racine or even Alfieri without complaint, and actually with critical enjoyment, and next morning their tempers will not be any the worse.

The paradox of Prague is that it is the antithe-

sis of its own spirit. "The stones of Prague" are a monument not to its greatness but to its degradation; they were thrown in rather a wholesale and grand manner at the Czech people by its conquerors. Most of the palaces and churches rose after Bohemia had ceased to be an independent nation; they were built for foreign adventurers by foreign architects; they are in spirit Catholic and aristocratic whereas Bohemia has always been democratic and Protestant. The great name in Bohemian history is Jan Hus, who had a sort of anticipatory dislike of fine architecture, as if he had known in advance that the downfall of his nation and of his religion would be commemorated in the baroque style by Jesuits. Architecture finally triumphed over religion in Bohemia, as it has in so many other nations. Hus was burned at Bâle, after having been assured by the Church, though not in these words, that he would only burn in a hotter place. After his death the whole energy of the Bohemian people went for two centuries into theology and the military campaigns which at that time formed the official appendix to it. During the first hundred years, Bohemia met and defeated again and again the united armies of almost all the nations in Europe; under her blind Hussite leader, Zizka, and his successors the two Prokops, she was unbeatable. But the power which she had gained

in her century-long struggle against Europe she lost in the ensuing century of peace, which for her meant theological dissension. Bloody battles were fought between the various Hussite parties, and against what was left of them Rome, the Jesuits, and the Habsburgs easily prevailed. They lost the last shadow of independence at the battle of the White Mountain in 1621; and after that they became a department of the Habsburg autocracy and the official key was turned upon them for three hundred years. In the work of destroying the Bohemian nation the Jesuits undertook that part for which they had the best capacity: they extirpated the literature. After Hus, Bohemia had had a large and various literature: of that almost nothing remains. Accompanied by soldiers, the Jesuits entered in Czech houses, confiscated books, which they could not read, and burned them. One holy man boasted that he had destroyed with his own hands 60,000 Czech books. But more than parchment was destroyed. There was the usual number of executions and of those burnings with the preliminary cutting out of the tongue which seem to be inseparable from religious reformations. Bohemia lost almost her entire nobility, by death or by exile; and twenty years after their defeat at the White Mountain, the population of Bohemia had fallen from 3,000,000 to 800,000.

These are the memories, glorious and lamentable, which represent to the Czech's their nationality. They see themselves in the Hussites, the first Protestants of Europe, originators in the parallel arts of theology and of war. Whatever was free-thinking and democratic in the Hussite movement speaks to them directly; for the Czechs are to-day, if politically Catholics, psychologically free thinkers, sometimes with disdain and even hatred; and their egalitarian vigilance is excessive and awkward, a thorn in sensitive flesh. But with all these memories of victorious defiance to Europe for two centuries, of subjection or banishment following it, they live in a town built mainly by their oppressors, a baroque city with something aristocratic and ecclesiastical in it, graceful and distinguished, so romantic in all its lines that the hearts of its very friends can not remain hardened against it. If I were a Czech I think I should regard Prague with a sort of melancholy pride as a beautiful daughter who had sold herself again and again, and in doing so had become infinitely rich in foreign allurements and exotic memories, achieving a unique synthesis of harmonious and contradictory charms. But very likely I should not feel like that at all. I have had one or two pale discussions with Czech professors on the relative importance of morality and of art, knowing that

morality was another name for Hus and his followers, and art, for the Jesuit palaces and churches. But the discussions have always been academic. Prague has not been implicated in them, for the Czechs love their capital *sans phrase*, because they can not help it.

Thus, the aristocratic oppression of three hundred years, while it took away from the Czechs their liberty, has left them something solid which only time can destroy. The public offices and parks of Prague are more splendid than a democratic State customarily possesses, and infinitely in better taste, for the offices are old palaces and the parks are palace gardens. The latter especially are miracles of taste; in them nature herself is made stylish. They are without the terribly opulent and ostentatious look which municipal grounds invariably have; they are simple and austere, with a sort of aristocratic asperity and poverty. But it is not merely these, along with a hundred palaces, and a few flawless streets, which the Republic has gained by having had an aristocracy before it. It is a whole tradition, and that tradition is Prague. The other traditions, that of stupid oppression and open injustice, will be forgotten: this will remain.



## XXII (CONTINUED)

### IMPRESSIONS OF PRAGUE—3

IT is a mark of republics that the people who live under them take them seriously. I do not mean that they have any illusions about the shortcomings of their own republic; they may be as cynical about it as any old diplomatist who lives behind the scenes of a monarchy; but they do take the republican ideal as a reality. This infuses a certain genuineness into their political life, a sort of everyday realism and spirit of practicality which one misses in monarchies, constitutional or absolute. The people's attitude towards a king is always romantic, a thing almost divorced from their average thoughts and preoccupations; it is not spoken of, because it is not a matter for thought or, therefore, for conversation: in every well established and flourishing monarchy it is almost a blasphemy to extend one's vocabulary, where the monarch is concerned, beyond the simple word "Hurrah!" or its equivalent. One can do nothing with a prince but crown him, applaud him and bury him; but one can change one's president, work for or against him, and discuss him

with more freedom than one can one's next-door neighbor. A republic becomes a part of one's activities in a more concrete sense than a monarchy. Behind them both stands, it is true, that icy, indifferent financial power which it is so difficult for men to comprehend or to credit, especially if they are disinterested citizens suffering under the illusion that honesty in themselves will always be answered by honesty in other people. But even here, the more skeptical, practical and independent temper of the citizens of republics will probably make them the first to pull aside this more than sacred veil, for their attitude towards power of any kind is easy, and lacks that inhibiting quality, reverence.

One becomes aware of the vitality of the republican idea in Prague as soon as one enters the city. Whether one walks the streets or sits in the cafés, one hears a political din; it seems as if the whole people, old and young, after being denied all their life any voice in their political fate, had resolved at last to enjoy an orgy of self-government. They discuss politics, interests, grievances, new acts, with measureless delight: they enjoy their very difficulties because of the freedom with which they can discuss them. Their political passion bursts out everywhere: in the cabarets, where no evening passes without the singing of half a dozen patriotic songs in which

every line ends with "*Cesky*" that does not end with "*Republiky*"; in the cafés, where there are always two pictures, one of President Masaryk and one of President Wilson, staring at each other from opposite walls or hanging amicably side by side; in the *Sokols*, or gymnastic clubs, which in the old days of suppression did so much to encourage the Czechs in their struggle against Austria.

The new Republic is encompassed with difficulties. It has trouble with the large block of Germans still left in Bohemia as an unlucky reminder of the old Government: it has trouble with Slovakia, which considers that it is not being treated on an equality with Bohemia. It has an ocean of muddle left by the old Empire, and a new and inexperienced class of Czech officials who, like amateur Columbuses, are attempting to circumnavigate it; for all the Imperial officials were Germans. Yet in no country in Europe, perhaps, is there such a general feeling of hope. The temper of the people communicates itself to one at once, and one realizes that one is in a new and vigorous nation, and that the blasé, tired spirit of the longer-established nations, with too much of the past in them, here counts for nothing. It is a tonic for anyone suffering from a too old, too firmly established civilization to go to Prague and in the midst of confusion and hope, to see

order, or any rate disorder, rising out of chaos. The Czechs are not tolerant and diplomatic; on the contrary, their vexations explode in periodical fits of irritation; but this impatient soil is the most fertile for experiment.

Nothing is more difficult than to catch, to set down, the generalized qualities of a people, and yet nothing is more necessary if one has temerarily begun to write of them. Emerson in his "English Traits" left a model of this kind of writing, in which the balance between intuition and observation was marvelously held; and yet in it he said things about the English which the English will never recognize as being applicable to them. Whether these things were therefore untrue—or true—is a different question, for the mental picture which a people has of itself is probably as incapable of being changed as the reality. "England," says the Englishman, and he means something quite different from what any one else means when he utters the word. These are mysteries, and I make no pretense of penetrating a mystery so complex as that of the Czech people. My first impression of them was disappointing. They are Slavs, and yet they are not "Slavonic"; they are in their aspirations and in their traditions a Western European people, and yet they are not "Western." They have not the overpowering charm of the Russians, that charm

which to Anglo-Saxons seems almost voluptuous in its richness; or the heroic and impossible qualities, the aspiration after the superhuman, which so many Serbs have. Their manners in public, on the other hand, to mention one of the achievements of Western civilization, are so atrocious, so helpless and at the same time so naïvely egotistic, that they set one in revolt until in a few weeks one manages to invent, in sheer self-defense, something quite as bad. During my first weeks in Prague I had an image of the crowds in the streets as a multitude of elbows stuck out in a hostile chaos. Only when, after six months, I went over the border to Dresden, did I realize what a pleasant thing it may be to walk along a crowded pavement. Czechs themselves have told me that their countrymen have the worst manners in Europe. This they attribute partly to the destruction of the Czech aristocracy after the battle of the White Hill (1620), partly to the alien tyranny under which, during the past three hundred years, the people have developed a constitutional growl. Naturally the Czechs did not wish to copy the manners of the foreign nobility, good as these were; they tried, rather, to express in their demeanor what they were forbidden to express in words. Under the Republic this boorishness by implication has been strengthened;

bluntness is carried to a fanatical extreme, is embraced almost as a holy crusade. Bad manners have become almost a public duty, and the serried elbows of the Czechs are symbolical of republican fervor. There is nothing, after all, more democratic than an elbow.

The Czechs are shrewd, enterprising, very resourceful in all practical affairs, but individualists to a degree almost incredible to peoples who, like the Germans and the English, have a genius for collective action. Socialists in theory, they are in practice the most uncompromising individualists in Europe. It may be the very ardor of their individualism which makes them intellectually socialists, for socialism is at any rate a break with old tradition, an independent attitude; or it may be an instinct of self-preservation which warns them that a socialist theory and Government are necessary if they are not to be disintegrated by the violence of their individual wills. As it is, their ability in practical affairs has profited them little, simply because they have not made use of the advantages which come from collective action, the will to work together for the common and individual good. They are practical with tact, almost with genius, but in a manner which the Western nations have long left behind. They are content, in both their private and public works,

with improvisations; and while these are marvelously ingenious, one knows that in other nations the same purposes are being better fulfilled with a fraction of the skill and artistic effort.

I spoke of the practical temper of the Czech people to a professor at the Prague University, an intelligent man and a patriot; and I became conscious immediately of the inadequacy of the implication. The Czechs, he told me, are misunderstood from both sides. They are misapprehended by the Russians because they have so many of the common and necessary virtues of the West, and by the Western peoples because they are, in spite of all disguises, essentially Slavonic. More than any of the other Slavs, he said, they have the moral passion which in Europe is associated with England and America. In their intellectual lucidity, their perspicacity, their quick wit, they approximate in a curious way the French; but it is a mistake to conclude that they have lost that Slavonic temperament which is perhaps the most humanly universal thing that Europe has yet produced. They are the branch of the Slav people which stretches most saliently, most perilously, into the heart of alien Europe; they are the first Westernized Slavs but they remain Slavs. I listened skeptically, for I did not know much at that time of modern Czech litera-



ture, a literature more remarkable in its union of originality and naturalness than any other contemporary literature of which I can think. There at any rate, one gets a union of profundity and clearness, of naturalness and form, of warmth and discipline, which is satisfying because it is organic. This synthesis of qualities is not sought for; it is the racial and historical heritage of the Czechs, a rich, accumulated heritage; the fruit, now to be plucked at last, of their Eastern origin and their Western destiny. In the Czech writers there is no conflict between the two influences which one would have expected to find at war in them: the Russian and the French. This conflict they have escaped—or lost—through their almost unique fluidity. They have adapted themselves with such tact to the Western way of life that they have actually become Western with an Eastern accent, it is true, but so naturally as not to appear bizarre; and though they are misunderstood by the Slavs and the French alike, one finds in them at last something normal and inevitable, something achieved by art, but achieved unconsciously and as by the working of nature itself.

But though there is no division horizontally in the Czech nature, there is a division vertically, or rather in that spiritual dimension where the

terms "vertical" and "horizontal" are alike meaningless. They have in them a vein of black melancholy, a bitter, hidden complex which makes them sometimes moody and envious, and full of that sardonic contempt which is one of the countless forms of self-contempt. With all their adaptability, their capacity, their temperamental resource, they are an obscurely disappointed people. This makes them capable of acts of incredible meanness, thrown out defiantly, one feels as a sort of violent declaration to the world and to themselves, of that universal human meanness which they will not ignore. When they are mean, it is a tormented declaration that humanity is so, a sort of throwing of human corruption in the face of humanity. The Czechs are always skeptical about their good actions, and seek relief by committing sins to refute them. This is in them, as in so many other Slavs, an unresolved torment, a continual testing of the soul from which they can not escape; and in the end it proves nothing, or rather it only proves the conviction with which they began. The paradox is that this people, almost pathological on one side, have on the other an idyllic, almost Arcadian capacity for joy. Their early-morning, virginal flawlessness in emotion it is impossible to catch in prose; but it pervades their poetry, even when it is most melan-

choly and most mordant, and it appears in undisguised *naïveté*, in the music of Dvořák and Smetana. It is a natural elegance, a spontaneous, finished grace which, once one has known it, one prefers even to the cultivated and seductive charm of the French.

## XXIII

### REFLECTIONS AND CONJECTURES

THERE is nothing which betrays mediocrity of thought more clearly than an abuse of the sense of humor, the elevation of it into a criterion. The quiet, humorous pronouncement, so telling in certain circles, is in the world of ideas the ultimate piece of *gaucherie*. When one remembers with what deadly moderation of phrase the misguided ideas of Copernicus, Darwin and how many others were once condemned. . . . Well, the philosophers themselves, who are not given to laughing, can in these cases laugh last. Moral: One should have a second sense of humor to apply to one's sense of humor.

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It is easy to understand why the Brahmins in all times have been a caste, and the most superior of them all. Every intellectual man has a profound conviction of his superiority to the average sensual man; and this sense of superiority arises from his unique attitude to himself—one means to his passions. The mind of the intellectual is

so securely on the top of his passions, that sometimes it reaches the stage when it sterilizes them altogether and regards them as things naïve and laughable. But around him the Brahmin sees nothing but the people who are altogether under the thumb of their passions, people who are their very embodiment. Even when these possess the greatest powers of expression, even when they are poets, they will appear to him naïve.

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The two sides: WOMAN—A young man, and so waste his time among books! What a misdirection of energy!

PHILOSOPHER—A thinker, and he squanders his powers in the enjoyments of passion! What a waste of thought!

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The question whether the cultivation of the mind brings happiness or misery is the idlest in the world, for this reason: that the mere consideration of the object of education disposes of it. For the truth is that we train the mind in order to gain mastery over life, and in the attainment of—or rather in the struggle to attain—that object, a form of happiness is found, perhaps the only stable form of happiness. The whole question appears then so infinitely remote as to be un-

real. It is a question indeed, only to those whose culture is passive, those who have "culture without the disposition," to use the phrase of Leonardo; those, in short, who know neither the means nor the end of education, and whose culture is simply an irrelevancy, a burden. Men who are always busy intellectually are never troubled by it. Thus, it is not fundamentally a problem of culture at all, but a problem of human nature; for the habit of assessing happiness and misery is one common to all those, cultured and uncultured, whose attitude to life is passive. These are the registers of events, both those they suffer and those they accomplish; registers warped, however, by the fact that things borne passively have always in them a little of the bitterness of constraint, and are by no means felt impartially. Grief and happiness are alike *endured* by the passive, and have alike therefore the complexion of evils. But all action, however ignorant, is an attempt to establish mastery over phenomena; that is, to make something of them, to bend them to the human will. And if the question of happiness has been raised in connection with knowledge chiefly, that is because there it can be expressed in the grandest terms; for where the ignorant are crushed only by their personal experiences, the savant is annihilated beneath the suffering of universal history and thought. Nevertheless, the

disposition to assess is anterior to the acquirement of culture.

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Sometimes perfectly commonplace people are made interesting by having a repression: it adds mystery where everything before was all too simple. He has a wonderful temperament? Take away his repressions, and see how much of it is left.

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I had offended him knowingly, and he was not angry, but, to my discomfiture, perfectly magnanimous and kind. "Are you quite well?" I asked him. Even at this time of day to be really virtuous is to be suspected of a *double entente*.

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A reasonable man restrains his anger because he sees it is of no utility. The passionate man, however, thinks he restrains it in order to wound his opponent more. All good qualities are subject to suspicion. We look for the littleness which they conceal.

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For some time in the nineteenth century it was fashionable to talk of life as a sickness, and to look upon art as the remedy. But it is clear that



there is no remedy for life; for the remedy—that, too, is life. Yet the remark that art is the remedy for life, must be repeated at least a thousand times every year.

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The greatest danger to freedom lies not in the existence of men of despotic personality, but in that of men with no personality at all. These will gladly permit freedom to be abolished; they simply do not know what is happening, they are perfectly unconscious of any wrong. The dominating man at least knows within himself what the emotion of liberty is; and it is not entirely impossible to make him respond to the call of common liberty. But the others——Freedom and slavery are only names to them and will never be anything else.

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The claim of the realists that they have succeeded in extracting beauty from squalor is still to be established. A very little strictness in analysis would show that—to take a modern example—what is beautiful in Mr. James Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" can with great ease be separated from what is merely ugly. The elements exist quite separately in this work, so that when we pass from the one to the other, we are so surprised that we experience a conscious

shock. And the same—in spite of Flaubert's style—can be said of "Madame Bovary." The astonishing beauty—astonishing, indeed—which is sometimes attained, is the beauty of art, and of traditional art. The naturalistic theory, on the other hand, is responsible for all the ugliness; for whatever in the book is not successful.

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It is strange that people can still be found who doubt that thought has a great effect on men's physiognomies and movements. You can tell simply by looking at them whether a company of men are consulting about some important matter or merely gossiping. In the former case the expression on their faces, and their very arms, legs and shoulders will be full of dignity. A psychologist should also be able to discern whether the subject of the consultation is of universal or only of private import; and whether it is philosophical or practical. There is one difficult problem, however. It is almost impossible to distinguish a discussion on politics from one on religion: in both, men lose their temper in exactly the same way.

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In all periods there have been wrongs to be righted, injustice, poverty, distress, ignorance, dis-

ease; and not less in the periods when art has flourished than in others. When one regards the artist against this background of grim struggle he must always appear a gifted child, a trifler, not altogether responsible for himself. The tolerance of the man of affairs for him is amazing and creditable, seeing that all artists fiddle while Rome burns, and that Rome is always burning. This tolerance is really a sort of superstition, but a salutary one, since it is ultimately wiser than the worldly wisdom of the man of affairs. For the artists, the triflers, ultimately create a culture; while all that the men of action do, as a rule, is to make a noise, to shake the world to pieces, but at last to put all the fragments back where they were before. A dim realization of this is probably present in their unwilling respect for the artist.

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In all works of art which satisfy there must be something dissatisfying; in all those which dissatisfy there must be something satisfying: otherwise men would not eternally return to them.

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Writers who stimulate, who incite to thought, are of three classes. Of the lowest are those who give a paradoxical turn to a platitude: these are valuable, for they make the platitude live.

Restated by them, it surprises us, and surprise is a sign of vitality: if a thought takes us unawares, we immediately begin to think about it. The second class contains those writers who say more than they know they are saying. These are more salutary still, for they incite us to complete what they have imperfectly said, and to make their thought our own. Finally, there are those who say only a fraction of what is in their minds. These are the most valuable of all; they give us the starting-point of a whole philosophy and leave us to create it for ourselves. To the first class, belong Wilde and Mr. Chesterton; to the second, Blake and Nietzsche; to the last, Heraclitus and Pascal. The writer, however, who says all he intends to say, and says it simply and completely, does not encourage us to think creatively. We follow him as far as he goes, but we do not go beyond him.

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There is a mystery of stupidity as well as a mystery of genius. The philosopher is an enigma to the average man, but not a greater one than the average man is to the philosopher. Stupidity and genius are equally wonderful to each other. The artist experiences almost as much trouble when he tries to portray the one as the other.

The man who is sure of his own superiority, so that this certainty has become a second nature, loses the vanity which we all impute to superior persons. This superiority has to him become so self-evident that he never thinks of expressing it; and he regards everything not as lower than himself, but simply as interesting. To insist on one's superiority, to express it in any way whatsoever, is to betray a doubt of it which can only be stilled by expression. The ideal critic would be a man really gifted who was certain of his superiority. But it is unlikely on the other hand that he would become a critic.

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In spite of his edifying appearance, what really distinguishes the philosopher from the average man and from the artist is that his eye is far more immoral than theirs. The distrust in which the ignorant have always held philosophers—the fact, for instance, that in the Middle Ages they were commonly thought to be in league with the devil—has something in it. As a matter of fact, the philosopher is much nearer the devil than is usually suspected; his attitude to him is one of benevolent curiosity. The notorious blamelessness of the lives of philosophers is not really in contradiction to this. Philosophers live in a harmless fashion, not because their notions are moral, but

because all their dangerous passions have been weakened, and can only behave in a mediocre way. But when great desire for glory and great power of intellect have been united in one man, he has not hesitated to transgress the moral standard. Bacon is not an enigma ; he is simply a philosopher in practice.

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The mind gains mastery over life not entirely, as it thinks, by its own strength, but because of the fact that it weakens what it desires to overcome. It regulates the passions, for instance, not by disciplining but by reducing them—more exactly, perhaps, by stealing from them : the energy which is going to the passions it diverts to itself. In time the philosopher is so engrossed in his thoughts that he is not even interested in the passions ; they then behave very well—they have no one to take notice of them ! In the same way muscular energy is transformed into thought ; hence the well-known coldness and laziness of philosophers. But the provident philosopher should nurture the passions—for consumption.

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Exactness is what counts in the art of writing ; it is what makes thoughts dynamic. A conception which is not defined arouses an uncertainty in the feelings : they cock their ears but they do not know

what course to take, for the word of command has not been given. It is always the last touch that counts. Exactitude in the world of thought corresponds to intensity in that of passion, and the one evokes the other. Let a generation of diffuse thinkers be given freedom of action, and they will inevitably be followed by a generation of people who can not feel intensely.

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If you believe something you should say it at least once; but you should not say it often. Like all precious things, Truth should be used sparingly. Say a thing twenty times and you no longer believe it.

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To be a perfectly honest writer—a writer, that is, true to his impressions—one thing is essential, one must not have a system. A system of thought is a method of exploiting impressions, of weaving them into a pattern, decided beforehand, and of crushing and distorting them for that end. All that one can honestly begin with is a starting-point; but better still if one have several; it makes for independence.

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To the artist in whose work there is the evidence of great labour, intense pains, minute care-



fulness, we give respect. Why is it? Artists are such extraordinary creatures, their qualities are so unique, that we are charmed when we find them in possession of such a commonplace and such a universal quality as hard work. It is the "touch of nature." In a navvy it would be undistinguished, but in an artist—we are enchanted!

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It is our moments of lowest vitality that have least æsthetic value, not those which are least pleasurable. Anguish and despair may find their expression in art; but the stupidity of fatigue, never. The fact that phrases like "getting up in the morning" or "going to bed" have in civilized society a sound of such final banality proves how alarmingly tired civilized people really are. Both phrases are associated with moments when people are tired, stupid, half-alive. We think of the old natural man rising refreshed at dawn in the forest. The savage awakens; the civilized man "gets up."

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The intensity of the unconscious is poetry; the intensity of the conscious is wit.

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It is often said that intellectual curiosity "purifies everything it touches." The adjective is in-

sidious, for curiosity by itself, naïve, wide-eyed curiosity, can make almost anything clean. To the inquisitive all things are pure. Gossips, whether in literature or common life, are the most innocent people that can be found; to discover what lewdness is, one must go to those who listen to them half-unwillingly. Scientists are the most pure people in the world and to anyone who is troubled by repressions or by conscience they appear almost charmingly naïve. In philosophies round which a faint and unpleasant odor hangs there is some inhibition of curiosity; and some emotion, not curiosity, enters into them. They would have been "cured" by a little more curiosity. What gives one's words a bad conscience is the desire to discover things which one wishes at the same time to conceal; it is not the longing to see unclean things, but to look at them through one's fingers, so that even in contemplation they remain unclean. The inquisitive man, however, does not see unclean things, but only things; for it does not matter how unpresentable a thing may be, if it is regarded calmly it becomes wonderfully inoffensive. The seduction of Brantôme's "*La Vie des Dames Galantes*" is not the seduction of sex; it is the charm of the unembarrassed curiosity maintained there before the vagaries of sex. The "French novel" which has been blamed by Puritans for its sexual attraction, really attracts

us by its attitude of curiosity, its frankness. Half the charm of cynicism is in its open-mindedness: when a sordid thought is uttered publicly, in a roomful of people or in a book, it is no longer sordid but merely an object of attention. Cynical writers thus make us disinterested and enable us to regard evil intelligently, and to see it without attraction. They are the scientists of morals.

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To be interested in scandal is perhaps the first qualification for writing without clumsiness on morals. Lacking that, one's observations are bound to be without concreteness, and to meander on complacently without demonstration. The France of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was noted for its gossip, its memoirs, letters and comedies, and it was celebrated also for a set of moralists who had an almost supreme capacity for seizing the rule and allowing the legitimate exception, and for holding the balance between virtue and vice with just the fit inclination on the side of virtue. Conversation was then more gross than it is to-day; a greater variety of motives and passions were discussed openly and with more freedom than now; and consequently people were less afraid of transgressions, and could show more subtlety in avoiding or in indulging them.

This frankness in conversation was the training-ground for La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and Chamfort, and gave them that niceness in tracing general rules and in defining nuances which make them appear to-day a little irreverent towards morality; for whoever takes morality practically has always the danger of seeming to be immoral. The honesty with which the French moralists talked about virtue was only equaled by the frankness with which they wrote about vice. There they were unscrupulously clear and clean, and they filled books with a sort of universal scandal, scandal not about individuals merely, but about mankind, the most witty, mordant and enjoyable scandal that has ever been penned. This must have been then a great moral relief (it is so still); for in talking of it one can make everything pleasurable. Even our fear of death can be mitigated by words. Fontenelle formulated at this time a characteristic objection to war: it interrupted conversation, he said.

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The rule is solemn; the exception is witty.

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A serious philosopher should be trusted only when he is witty. Wit is the sign that after casting himself into profundities he has been lucky

enough to catch himself back again. It is his laugh of relief that he has not been lost.

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Curiosity equalizes: if we look at anything long enough it is reduced or increased to an equality with ourselves. The object of our contemplation may be an insect or the universe; the one fills our mind and the other can do nothing more. As a fragment, five feet six inches, of flesh and mind, regarding curiously the universe, I am on an equal footing with it. Curiosity, therefore, gives a sense of inward solidity, and an unembarrassed mien before the totality of things, which make for freedom. The attitude of mystery before the universe, on the other hand, fills us with a conviction of inferiority and of impotence; the poet, accordingly, as the inheritor of mystery, is in practical matters more helpless than other men. The Greeks were the first people known to us in whom the attitude of curiosity was strongly incarnated; and it is still the attitude which distinguishes Europe from the remainder of the world. Its results have been personality, and with the multiplication of persons, democracy, modern science, the exploitation of nature—the expression of an irreverent attitude to nature, and one which for all we know may be an abysmal act of blasphemy and something finally

wrong and incapable of bringing happiness. But at any rate we are committed to it, and it has given us our freedom in the Western sense. The Eastern races who, with the great exception of China, have to this day retained the attitude of mystery, have never felt themselves the equals of "the world," but only inferior or superior to it. Politically, this is expressed in the arbitrary absolute monarchies of the East, and in the fatalistic and superior submission of the people to them. Society, too, is a mystery to the Asiatic peoples, and they would probably condemn as a little mean and childish any attempt to rationalize it.

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People are more timid in their thoughts than they are in their actions; and a man will suddenly die for a cause as an escape from the ever-present thought that he may die for it. We suffer many things without very strictly scrutinizing them; what we can not endure is the thought that we are suffering. We offend in deed against honor and morality, and survive it, sometimes to our own surprise; but we do not dare often to offend against them in thought, and when we do we suffer subtly and cruelly. To transgress in deed one requires only weakness; but to sin in thought one needs daring and resolution. But most necessary of all for this kind of offense is the capacity

to move in a line of one's own, which is not the road of the multitude, and indeed takes one inexorably away from it and casts one into the midst of loneliness. When we sin in deed we sin as species, but when we sin in thought we sin as individuals, and we must bear on our own shoulders the full weight of our sin. Because the remorse it leaves is so much more poignant than that left by any other, the intellectual sin has been called the sin against the Holy Ghost.

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Our consciences become bad when, busied only apparently with things, we do not give our spirit to them, and are at the centre of our being in a state of metaphysical idleness; then, in spite of ourselves, we feel loaded and rammed down with sin. Intellectually we may have reduced morality to mere utility; we may even be skeptics who believe that "all things are allowable," yet we can not sin in the most modest way without suffering scruples and agonies, and at the same time we lose also that pleasure in sin which draws men so omnipotently towards it. Our very goodness disgusts us, and we are miserable without knowing it. The man, on the other hand, whose whole spirit is bent on a purpose, can indulge almost any passion, enjoy almost any pleasure, with a feeling which is like innocence. The man of ac-



tion and the artist are far less guilty in their own eyes than in the eyes of other people. Movement, even impetuosity, is the condition of spiritual health; and if our tempo is slower than another man's we can not judge him; we think of him as a stagnant pool generating its poison, whereas he is a rapid stream in which everything is free and healthy.

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Some people prefer compromise to a solution, even when the solution is easier; almost all practical men, for example: their finesse in bargaining is much better expressed where there is compromise than where there is merely finality.

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If truth were not necessary to us, if we could exist entirely without it, amiability would be the supreme virtue.

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When a writer sets down his pen carelessly, the whole world should be as dismayed as when a surgeon makes a reckless pass with his scalpel; for the existence of truth is at least as important as the life of one individual. Nevertheless the latter error appears infinitely more heinous to us because, although the murder is individual, we all

feel it in our flesh ; while truth has not become so essentially a part of us that we suffer from a particular or general butchery of it. We know that a literary crime is a crime, but we do not believe it. Yet great misfortunes may be precipitated, wars and famines may be procreated, by the careless or the unscrupulous use of a pen or of a hundred pens. The whole thing is still more amazing if it should be that we believe in our hearts that the soul is immortal, for then the literary dishonesty of one man may consign thousands to eternal torment. Most people do live on the assumption of individual immortality, yet the truth, even on that point, is of the least consequence to them. There is a general impression that the road which leads to ineffable, eternal glory is very broad and convenient, and packed with the bourgeoisie.

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If two men live together for five years they will have the same thoughts. They will quarrel continually, however, over the best way of expressing them.

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The strongest support of common social conventions is not fear of ridicule or of the law, but simple gregariousness, the desire, deep, naïve and spontaneous, to do the same things as other peo-

ple. How absurdly alike the members of a club become; they begin by thinking alike, they end by eating alike. We all desire at the same time not to be taken for anybody else and to be like everybody else. So long as this instinct lasts there is no fear for convention. Its chief agents, and perhaps the chief agents of human solidarity, are those facile, pliable spirits who begin to do what everybody else does just a week or so before everybody else begins to do it. The necessity to conform has little to do with the success of fashions. Conformity implies unwillingness, but this desire is active and spontaneous.

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There is a niggardliness which is merely a noble moderation in generosity so that the giver may not be ashamed. To be very benevolent a man must be a little insensitive; his feelings must be large, undifferentiated, and not too nice. Many men are inhumane through a too absolute deference to taste.

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The value of everything depends on the circumstances in which it is born. We should not strive to bring forth thoughts which will make the world beautiful, for these will only be a living demonstration that to us the world is not beau-

tiful. Weakness, once it is born, is eternally weakness. Our thoughts should be procreated when the whole world, not this part or that, is beautiful; for there is in these thoughts the strength of the world itself, and they are unshakable; for strength also when it is born is eternally strength. There are imperishable thoughts.

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There are in tragic art incredible intuitions which soar with one inevitable movement through the net of rationality and probability and seem impossible in their divination and truth. There are thoughts so true and yet so apparently unattainable by the mind that when we hear them we can not believe that they have been uttered. The prison scene in "Faust" contains inconceivable things. It could have been written only in a unique state of madness.

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The artist is the bravest of all men. He allows himself to become insane when his dæmon bids him.

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We can die with calmness, but we can not endure the idea of death; we can suffer, but we can not bear the contemplation of suffering; we can be happy, but we can not imagine the reality of

happiness; we can love, yet love in general always seems to us to be as intangible as a dream. What do we derive from imagination, then, except a more intense realization of suffering and a less real apprehension of joy than experience can give us? Pure delight, in spite of this.

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The man who can support happiness can generally support grief as well; the main requisite in both cases being the capacity to accept things. There are men, however, who find happiness as hard to swallow as unhappiness; they suffer from both, and both become for them an argument proving the undesirability of life. They end generally by refusing to accept happiness on account of the existence of suffering, which they also will not accept; like Ivan Karamazov who in advance would have nothing to do with the harmony which he assumed the world would attain in a few millenniums, because meantime every human being has to suffer. This is a mode of thinking and feeling fundamentally paradoxical; it is a condemnation of life from the centre of an unattained harmony, and at the same time a negation of this harmony because it must issue out of life: whereas suffering alone makes us desire harmony, and harmony can be attained

only through suffering. The strange thing is that this kind of men bear their own sufferings almost unconsciously, and add plentifully to them as if they desired more: it is the sufferings of others, of the world, that are so unbearable to them. They really take all the pain of the world upon their backs, but without being able to redeem it. But a great number of individual griefs are justified individually, for every pain redeems itself.

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The nihilist does not desire a state of absolute annihilation; he desires to annihilate, and therefore that something—the universe—should exist to be annihilated. He desires Being as given fact and not-Being as his expression. In doing this he is the opposite of everything to which men have given the name of God; he is, indeed, the most real modern conception which we have of the Devil. When we try to delineate him he becomes immediately a myth instead of a man, as the exquisite and exact Turgenev must have found to his discomfort and delight when he drew Bazarov in "Fathers and Sons." The nihilist is, indeed, a myth, but he is only the more real on that account; he is something more than a man, for he is within the skin of all men; and

though he is the symbol of death, he is the symbol of life also, inasmuch as perishableness is the condition of creation.

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It is dangerous to think of men as mere classes, whether it be economic, social or spiritual, for that is bound to lead to the justification of one class, generally a small one, and the condemnation of all the others. It is dangerous to think of men as nations or even as races, for then one can find for the overwhelming mass of mankind no *raison d'être* except the conditional one that without them a particular race or a single nation could not have existed. It is dangerous to think of some ideal society in the future towards which our own life is moving, for that makes our whole reality relative and bereaves it of its unconditional, unique truth. It is dangerous to regard the primitive races still existing, as a sort of irrelevancy in our world, and to be concerned with Europe only and not with Asia or even with Africa. It is dangerous to do all these things, and yet it is impossible not to do them. No man would be great if these assumptions, along with the mystical negation of them, were not in him. Every great man incarnates in himself what mankind has attained—and has not attained—and



in doing that he makes mankind irrelevant and at the same time in the highest sense relevant. This is the mystery of greatness.

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There are no good and no bad men if we take the sum of everybody's existence into account, their nights as well as their days, and allow as much reality to their dreams as to their waking hours. The unfulfilled desires of the virtuous are evil; the unfulfilled desires of the vicious are good: and conduct is not, as Matthew Arnold said, three-fourths of life; it is not even three-fourths of conduct. The desires which I do not express I must live with for ever, and endure their development, growth, transformation and degeneration within myself if I do not throw them out into the world. What dreams Marcus Aurelius must have had! Every night he must have been a sort of Tiberius. The faces of men tell us less than they should, because sleep as well as action traces lines upon them. The heads of men like Cæsar Borgia, who are known to have been cruel and conscienceless, have sometimes had an exalted and ethereal beauty which has astonished all men, and have preserved even in waking a strange look of tranquillity, as if they were frozen in some delightful dream. The

faces of the worst murderers can be paralleled in ugliness by the faces of the most blameless saints.

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All Utopian visions of the future are born of a very simple thing: fear.

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Only one side of great men can be seen by those who have not a sense of human tragedy. The other side is so securely hidden from them that, when it is presented, they will be ready to swear it is some one else. This has happened with many celebrated men, and with the greatest of all, Shakespeare. People can not bear to think that a man as great as Shakespeare should have been not merely unhappy (that is our common lot), but actually wretched. Yet it is his "other side," or rather its astonishing fitness and incongruity with the side which we know, which makes him and every other great man alive for us. Otherwise a great man is a mere figure; but most people prefer figures, because these give an illusion of an individual triumph over those too real miseries from which man ordinarily and predeterminedly can not escape. The figure is not a mere man, even if he is scarcely a man. He is, at the lowest, an escape from man. We forgive

the great their greatness; we enjoy it almost as if it were our own; but that the great should be miserable we can not forgive. What we value most in great men is our illusions about them.

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To guess is more difficult than to reason.

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Morality is not more good than it is taken to be, but more intelligent.

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What makes the poor ashamed is not their poverty, their disfiguring labor, shabby clothes and mean houses, but the consciousness that their humanity is always being implicitly denied by other classes. A man is ashamed when his humanity is not recognized; except he should happen to be inhuman on a grand scale, and should seek to put himself above men: the revenge of many who have started life in an inferior position.

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In the morning before getting up I can tell by the sound of the bells striking the hour in the town that the day is fine. We know whether people are good or bad by means as indirect or inexplicable as this: it is what our eye takes in

but does not know it takes in that convinces us. So much are we at the mercy of our judgments; we imagine we make them, but they make or unmake us.

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Hatred is, except in rare people, fleeting; but dislike lasts for a lifetime, and can rarely be overcome. Yet we hate always for a reason, and dislike for no reason at all, or for a reason of which we know nothing. It may be that what we call dislike is not an individual thing at all, but the reflection in us of an invisible, cosmic war that is being fought out in another dimension.

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A philosopher is a man who habitually asks himself absurd and shameless questions—and who answers them in perfect seriousness.

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I dreamt that I was looking at a map of Ireland. Suddenly it occurred to me: "From this map of Ireland I should be able to construct the world, to know by pure reason where the other lands lie, where the great straits, the small rivers, the mountains and the plains are." This intuition filled me with delight; I felt as if a secret had been disclosed, suddenly and dazzlingly. When I awoke I was surprised, amused and a little dis-

appointed to discover how foolish my dream had been. . . . Perhaps the whole of metaphysics is built on a foundation as grotesque as my Ireland, and with arguments as foolish—only we never awaken from the dream.

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It is the shallow who long for profundity: to the profound, depth is a necessity and a torment. They long for shallowness, and to remain on the surface.

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Naïve and sentimental people demand that the depths, too, should be beautiful: they imagine, indeed, that even ugly, that is, misformed things are beautiful "inwardly." The most frantically democratic illusion! Beauty pertains only to form, to surface. At its core everything is chaos, and therefore terrible.

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The quickening and relaxing of our heart-beats, the rush of blood to our cheeks and its withdrawal to the centre of our body, are things so mighty, so mysterious, so intimate and so much stronger than our will, that if we were to think too long of them, they would fill us with terror.

It is a sign of nobility in a thinker to value a great emotion more highly than an original thought.

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In temperament the pleasure-seeker, the man of the world, even the fool, are generally more rich and subtle than the philosopher. Out of him logic has ruled all inconsistency, all nuance; he has of all men the least color, the least interest. He actually is proud of his own commonplaceness and obviousness in desire and temper; he calls it being impersonal. But all that interests us in people is in the end their personal qualities, their mysteries.

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A man "reads philosophy" for ten years: by that time he is so embarrassed, so flustered, by ideas that he really does not know what he thinks. That is the time to invent or to borrow a system: the use of a system is that it thinks for one. In our time, when ideas lie in such heaps in every man's cellar, a new philosophy can only mean a new filing system.

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In every solid book there is either a man or a system. The one is a substitute for the other.

Eighty is nearer to eighteen than it is to fifty. It is not youth that the aged are disillusioned with, but middle age. Middle age is the most unsightly of all terms, because it is the term of prudence, of inglorious care, between the carelessness of youth and the carelessness of age. Age and youth are friends, but the middle-aged man is hated and despised; he is the eternal respectable outcast.

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Every man who lives until he is seventy must have been a Philistine, for to be middle-aged is to be Philistine. The only thing one can do is to preserve one's youth until one is quite old.

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Wisdom desires happiness alone; the folly of our hearts desires unhappiness as well. Is it therefore wiser?

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Unreflecting heroism, heroism without witnesses or judges, is profound and beautiful folly. The heroism inspired by wisdom is a special kind of prudence.

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As a dog or a cat grows older it does not become wise; it becomes careful. Man also.



Prudence is a special kind of fear; and in nine cases out of ten, the worst kind. In the tenth case it is a virtue almost superhuman; the unalterable contemplation of a goal which has perhaps for decades been coming a little nearer and a little nearer, the watchfulness of a great architect who will complete his design. But the mere anxiety for oneself——

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Pascal in the "Lettres Provinciales" showed how shabby and how ugly reason can be—I mean in his choice extracts from the Jesuit fathers. The means he adopted to refute these rational absurdities were irony and ridicule. This was a practical demonstration of the superiority of folly over reason.

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THE OLD HERETIC—"I do not argue. I prefer to stand on my own feet."

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There is something mean in the desire to make one's case logically unassailable. It is a laborious excess of prudence; one shields oneself even against being attacked.

In an age when the capacity to tell lies is lost, the capacity to tell the truth will soon be lost as well.

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The courage one needs to tell a bold lie is like nothing so much as the courage required to tell an unpopular truth.

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The sinner sins because he can sin well; the moralist exhorts him not to sin because he can exhort well; the psychologist looks on and points this out because he can point it out well. How clever this makes life! How stupid the opposite assumption makes it!

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THE ETERNAL FORERUNNER. A man came crying: "We need a new religion! We need a new religion!" All those who love to experience their needs, and conceive greatness as a painful aspiration, gathered around him, and he gained quite a reputation for profundity. Presently the founder of the new religion came, and in simple, terrible words spoke new truths. Nobody heard him; the forerunner and his followers were making such a noise. It is safer to be a prophecy than a fulfillment. Men like to seek, but not to find.

To discover and to be discovered are the two most terrible experiences which can occur to men. Perhaps every moment we narrowly avoid both of them.

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When one is on a mountain summit and one looks down upon the whole world, one can not see the thing which is the most worth seeing of all; the height one is standing on. It is the man at the foot whose soul is at once lifted up and daunted by the sublimity of the spectacle. Amateur theologians say that God had to create man in order to realize Himself. Did they mean that God put Himself at the foot of His mountain so as to *feel* that the mountain was, after all, there? The irony of the Creator's existence is that His creature, man, must have infinitely more satisfaction in contemplating Him than He has in contemplating man.

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The Rosicrucians, the Swedenborgians, and their degenerate survivors, the Theosophists, have produced men ridiculously original and interesting, considering their antecedents. That is because the "occult" method of thought is so enterprising and in some ways so fascinating. The Theosophists are not content to see trees, animals and men as trees, animals and men; they desire to know what these things are in another,

final dimension, and how they appear in the realm of eternal truth and in the eyes of God. This enterprise is so tremendously daring that to men such as these, with their beliefs and fears, it seems almost illicit and has in it a terrifying and irresistible nuance of blasphemy. All the usual, ratified ways to knowledge become insipid after it. . . . But, alas, the whole business postulates at the beginning "the Real World," long ago discovered and mapped out by philosophers and theologians; and all that these intrepid, heaven-scaling adventurers can find in the end, behind natural objects, is—this old world, already a mere concept, a mere platitude. It is the method which is entrancing; the results are mean. The "occultists" will never admit that the tree or the animal in itself, living and miraculous, is more interesting than the meaning which they give it. The poets, however, know this. . . . The adventures of these conceptional Don Quixotes have generally been condemned because they involve an entire renunciation of one's intellectual self-respect. But to object to them on that account is to misunderstand the matter. To these guessers, ambitious as Paracelsus, and not at all simple and amiable, intellectual self-respect seems bourgeois and ignoble. They regard it as men who conceive morality on a grand scale regard the small virtues of the Philistine. It is to them merely a piece of in-

tellectual mediocrity and self-complacency. . . . They are not to be blamed therefore for their unscrupulousness in thought. They are to be blamed solely because the truths which they discover make existence more vulgar and small; because they bereave appearance, the simple fact, of its meaning; and because when they have scaled heaven in the end they bring nothing back but platitudes.

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The philosopher's eternal *arrière-pensée*: The whole universe, after all, may be only a digression of God.

